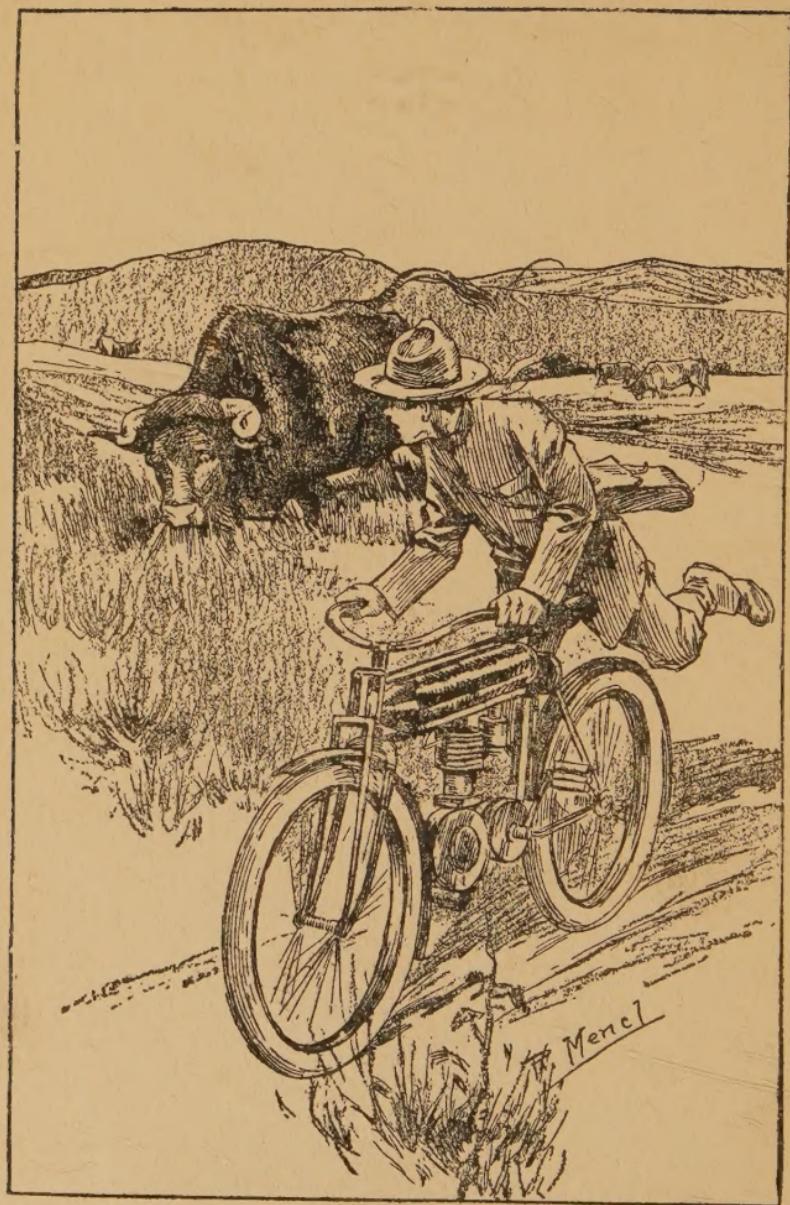


BOY SCOUTS

MOTOR-CYCLES



200
William Glim
Christmas
1916



"HE SAW THE BULL COMING AT FULL SPEED."

"Motor Cycles."

THE BOY SCOUTS MOTOR CYCLES

BY
RALPH VICTOR

AUTHOR OF "COMRADES SERIES"

Illustrated by
RUDOLF MENCL

New York
THE PLATT & PECK CO.

THE BOY SCOUTS

By RALPH VICTOR

The Boy Scout Movement has secured a hold on the American boy that is remarkable in its far-reaching effects. It is doing a great work in the development of manliness, self-confidence and physical perfection and is making better citizens out of the members of the organization.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I RIGHT OR LEFT	9
II AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE	20
III A FRIEND IN NEED	29
IV A TILTING TOURNAMENT	45
V A BAD BEGINNING	53
VI THE RED MOON	61
VII WHAT THE MORNING BROUGHT	68
VIII A TALE OF THE NORTHLAND	75
IX IN THE WILDERNESS	93
X JACK GOES	98
XI WHEN THE COLONEL CAME	109
XII WHERE'S DICK?	119
XIII THE MYSTERY DEEPENS	124
XIV LOOKING FOR DICK	134
XV WHERE JACK WENT	139
XVI JACK GETS INTO TROUBLE	149
XVII A FRIEND INDEED	157
XVIII A LONG CHASE	164
XIX WHERE DICK WENT	171
XX A FORTUNATE ENCOUNTER	179
XXI FINAL	187

THE BOY SCOUTS' MOTOR CYCLES

CHAPTER I

RIGHT OR LEFT

“**W**HICH road shall we take?” called Pepper Blake, stopping undecidedly at the fork of the road and getting down from his motor-cycle to read the direction upon the sign post.

“What does it say, Pepper?” asked Rand Peyton who was riding a little back of him.

“It don’t say anything but it reads, ‘Nepaun $2\frac{1}{2}$ M. Rockdale 5 M.,” replied the one addressed, reading the sign on the road to the right.
“What about the other one?”

“Morton $3\frac{1}{2}$ M. Rockdale 5 M.,” announced Rand, reading from the sign on the left hand road.

“It does!” ejaculated Pepper, rubbing his eyes and reading the sign in front of him again.
“That’s queer.” Then walking around to where Rand was standing he studied the sign from that point of view. “It sure does,” he affirmed.
“All roads seem to lead to Rockdale as well as

to Rome. Guess it's a toss up which one we take."

"There doesn't seem to be much choice," conceded Rand. "Suppose we leave it to Donald to decide."

"All right," agreed Pepper laughingly, "though I don't believe he will commit himself to either. Hallo, Don!" he called when Donald Graeme drew near, "which of these roads shall we take?"

"Which ever is best," replied Donald.

"Doesn't seem to be any best," declared Rand. "One seems as good or bad as the other. They are both pretty much of a muchness."

"Where do they go?" inquired Donald.

"Haven't gone anywhere since we've been here," responded Pepper.

"Chestnuts," retorted Donald. "Think up something new. The Indians sprang that on Columbus when he first landed. What do the signs say?"

"Rockdale 5 M.," read Pepper.

"Rockdale 5 M.," repeated Rand.

"Is that another joke?" demanded Donald.

"No-o," replied Pepper. "Read them yourself."

"In my opinion," announced Donald with deliberation after he had read the two signs, "we may just as well take the one road as the other."

"But which do you think it would be better for us to take?" persisted Pepper.

"Which ever you like best," replied Don.

"What is the matter now?" called Gerald Moore, coming up with Jack Blake, and Dick Wilson. "What are you stopping here for?"

"We were just thinking about going into camp here," responded Pepper.

"Into camp!" cried Jack, looking about him. "why so?"

"Oh, just to give Don time to decide which road we should take," answered Pepper.

"But we don't want to spend all of our outing here," objected Gerald.

"Then somebody must help him to a decision," declared Pepper.

"Oh, take the right hand road," suggested Gerald.

"No, take the left hand one," proposed Dick.

"Here comes an automobile," announced Pepper. "Let's leave it to them to decide. Which ever road they take we will follow."

"That's the ticket," cried Gerald. "Let's fol-

low the auto as far as we can and see where it will lead us. It doesn't make any difference to us which way we go."

Wherein he was greatly mistaken as after events would demonstrate.

"All right," agreed the others. "How does that suit you, Don?"

"It may no be a bad plan," admitted Donald.

Laughing at the characteristic caution with which Donald refused to commit himself to any positive assertion as to which road should be taken, the boys waited until the car had gone by them. The auto, in which were two men and which was traveling at the rate of thirty miles an hour, having taken the right hand road the boys remounted their cycles and followed.

The Uncas Patrol were out for a week's run through the country on their motor-cycles. They had started with only one definite destination in view, intending to ride in whatever direction their fancy might take them, from one town to another; stopping when night overtook them wherever they might happen to find themselves and even camping out in the open if need be. The one definite point they had in mind was, that on the first day of their trip they would

make a promised visit to Riverview, the country home of Mr. Whilden who had given them their motor-cycles.

Those who have read "The Patrol" the first volume of the Boy Scouts books, in which is told the story of the formation of The Uncas Patrol, will need no introduction to the six typical American boys: Randolph Peyton, Donald Graeme, Gerald Moore, Dick Wilson and Jack and Pepper Blake, who made up the Patrol. As related in the previous volume the boys had each been presented with a motor-cycle by Mr. Whilden, the President of the Dart Motor-cycle Company, this as a token of his gratitude to them for having rescued his daughter and son when their canoe was overturned in the Hudson.

The morning on which the boys had started on their trip was cool and delightful and they were in high spirits at the prospect of many novel experiences on their outing. At times as they rode along they stopped to exchange a few words, or again, where a level stretch of the road tempted them, indulging in an impromptu race. Thus they rode along with no particular incidents to note until they came to the top of a hill on the far side of which was a very sharp descent.

Donald, who was now in the lead shouted to the others.

"Hurry up, boys, there's trouble below!"

"What is it, Don?" called Rand, who was next in line.

"The auto has run up on the bank and is pretty near on its side."

"Anybody hurt?" called Jack.

"Cannot tell from here," was the response.

"Come on," cried Pepper, preparing to start down the hill, "they may need help."

"In my opinion," declared Don, who had jumped from his cycle and was walking down, "if we ride down this hill 'tis more than likely that some of us may be needing help more than they do."

"Oh, come on," expostulated Pepper. "It is good clear going all the way and we can coast down without any trouble."

"Faith, ye can coast all right," put in Gerald, "but 'tis the stopping d'ye moind."

"Better not try it, Pepper," cautioned Rand.

"But we won't get to the Whildens to-day," insisted Pepper, "if we are going to walk down every little hill."

"And we won't get there at all," remonstrated

Rand, "if you take a tumble and break some of your bones."

"Pooh! who's going to tumble," cried Pepper, mounting in spite of their protests.

The hill they were descending was long as well as steep, with a sharp turn at the base. It was in making this curve that the automobile had left the road and ploughed into the bank where it lay almost on its side. Donald and those with him were but a little more than a quarter of the way down when Pepper, who was almost at the bottom, raising his cap to wave it, lost control of his cycle which suddenly swerved, running up on the bank and throwing him over the front of the machine.

"He'll kill himself yet if he isn't more careful," declared Rand, starting on a run down the hill. But Pepper was up almost as soon as down and was busy brushing the dirt from his clothes when the others joined him.

"Shure, ye c'udn't kill him if ye tried," asserted Gerald. "Faith, he's got more lives than a dozen cats. If ye were to throw him off the top of a house there'd be somebody going along with a feather bed for him to drop into."

"Are you hurt, Pepper?" inquired Rand.

"Only in my feelings," responded Pepper, "to think I let it get away with me."

"Did I no tell you," reproved Donald, "that it was no hill to be riding down?"

"Of course you did, old Solomon," retorted Pepper, "but I would have been all right if —"

"If you had more sense," returned Donald.

"Begorrah, if he had more sinse he wouldn't be Pepper," put in Gerald.

By this time they had come to the automobile beside which a man was standing apparently at a loss what to do.

"Can we help you?" asked Rand, stopping in the road.

"I don't know whether you can or not," replied the man, who was a rather rough looking person although fairly well dressed. "If you can do anything with it it is more than I can."

"Back it down!" suggested Pepper.

"I don't know how," confessed the man. "I don't know anything about them and the chauffeur has gone off and left me."

"Where has he gone?" asked Pepper.

"He went ahead," the man answered. "I guess he has gone for help."

"Let's see if we can't get it off the bank," sug-

gested Donald. Climbing up in front of the car he started cranking the engine but it absolutely refused to respond.

"In my opinion," declared Donald when he had tired himself out turning the handle, "there is something not quite right with the engine."

"I don't think there is much doubt on that point," agreed Jack, "but perhaps we can fix it."

But after fussing over it for some time without any result except to produce a series of explosions that sounded like a pack of fire crackers going off in a barrel they were obliged to give it up.

"That reminds me—" began Dick.

"Of Fourth of July," broke in Jack. "So it does me, but that doesn't cut any ice now."

"It reminds me," persisted Dick, "of something I read in the paper about somebody towing an auto with a motor-cycle."

"It must have been in the *Crest*," said Donald. "That sounds like one of Jack's fairy tales."

"Let's try it," urged Pepper. "Maybe we can play the part of good fairies and pull him out of his difficulties."

"But we haven't anything to do it with," objected Donald.

"There are some ropes in the pannier," said the man.

With the ropes found in the pannier two of the cycles were attached to the back of the car and by dint of much pulling and hauling by Donald and Rand with their cycles and aided by the pushing and prying of the others, the auto was finally pulled back on to the road. Another attempt was now made to put the engine in order but with no greater success than before.

"Where were you going?" asked Rand of the man.

"To Springville," he replied, "but any place where I can get it fixed will suit me."

"We will tow you to the next town where you will probably find a garage if that will suit you," offered Rand.

"Thank you," replied the man, "that will do nicely."

Attaching three of the cycles to the front of the car they were about to start off when the man halted them.

"How are you going to steer it?" he asked.

"Can't you do it?" asked Rand.

"No, don't know a thing about them," he replied.

"Then you had better get in, Pepper," decided Rand. "Take your cycle in with you."

When this had been done, with three cycles attached to the car, the run to Nepaun was soon made.

"Where do you want to go?" asked Pepper of the man when they came to the town.

"Take it to the nearest garage and leave it there," he replied. "I will tell them what to do to it. I am going to the bank to get some money and I will meet you there and pay you for what you have done."

"Oh, we don't want any pay," declared Rand. "We won't take any pay for helping anyone in difficulty. Don't you think you had better go with us to the garage?"

"Oh, that's all right," the man replied, getting out of the car. "Just leave it at the garage. You will get your pay all right," he added with a peculiar smile, at the same time hastening up the street. A smile which the boys did not comprehend until later.

"Well, what do you think of that?" demanded Jack. "To go off and leave us like that. What are we going to do with the thing?"

CHAPTER II

AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE

“THE only thing to do with it is to take it to a garage, I suppose,” remarked Rand, ruefully contemplating the automobile the charge of which had thus been unceremoniously thrust upon them. “The question is where to find one?”

“Looking for a garage?” asked a man who sauntering up to where the boys were standing by the auto had overheard their talk. Stopping he looked the car over and noted the number.

“Yes,” replied Rand, “can you tell where there is one?”

“There is one over on Palisade Avenue,” the man answered.

“Where is that?” asked Pepper. “Far from here?”

“Only a little way,” was the reply, “over on the next road. I am going that way and will show you where it is.”

“Thank you,” replied Rand. “If you get in the car we will take you there.”

Getting into the car beside Pepper the stranger

directed them through a cross street and to the main street of the town on which the garage was situated.

"The owner said to leave the car here," explained Rand to the manager of the garage, who came out to them. "He will call and tell you what to do with it."

"Very well," replied the manager. "Just leave it there and I will take care of it. Who does it belong to?"

"I don't know his name," replied Rand. "We found him on the road and towed him in. He didn't say what his name was."

"Then you don't know him?"

"No, never saw him before," answered Rand.

"Oh, come along," broke in Pepper. "We have spent enough time on the old thing, already."

"Not so fast, young man!" interrupted the man who had shown them the way to the garage. "You are going to stop right here!"

"We are — not," exclaimed Pepper, getting on his cycle ready to start.

"Stop!" shouted the man. "You are all under arrest!"

"Under arrest?" cried Rand, looking on it as

a rather stupid joke and preparing to ride away. "For what?"

"For stealing this car," answered the man, displaying a shield. "I am an officer and I put you under arrest."

"Stealing your grandmother!" cried Pepper hotly. "What is the matter with you, anyhow? Didn't we just tell we found it broken down on the road and towed it in for the owner?"

"Just found it down the road and towed it in," repeated the officer sneeringly. "Can't you think of a better story than that?"

"We don't have to think up any stories," retorted Pepper. "If this is a joke it has gone far enough, if it isn't you will be sorry for it before you are through."

"Oh, I will, eh?" returned the officer. "We will see about that. You just come along with me and tell it to the Judge."

"What is the matter with running away from him?" whispered Pepper to Rand. "He never could catch us."

"Better not," counseled Rand. "We will see it out. It's only a stupid blunder."

"What are you whispering about?" demanded the officer. "Trying to get away?"

"We were just remarking what stupid blunderers some people are," remarked Pepper pleasantly.

"Meaning me," cried the officer angrily. "Well I am not so stupid as to be bluffed by you. Leave your cycles here and come along."

"What for?" demanded Pepper, preparing to resist and holding fast to his cycle.

"Take it easy, Pepper," advised Donald; "I think maybe they will be safe here."

"I am not sure of that," retorted Pepper, "if he has anything to do with them."

"That's enough of your insolence!" cried the officer, seizing Pepper and shaking him roughly.

"Keep your hands off him!" commanded Rand, advancing toward the officer. "Don't you dare to touch one of us!"

"Ho!" cried the officer, turning on Rand. "Indeed! Any more from you and I'll —"

"Better stop right there, Wayne," cautioned the manager of the garage. "Don't go too far. You have no occasion to touch them. They haven't resisted you."

"Then he wants to keep a civil tongue in his head," replied the officer surlily. "Come along with me," he added gruffly to the boys.

"What's the trouble?" asked a boy of about Pepper's age, who had been attracted by the commotion, giving him the scout sign and walking beside Pepper. "I am a scout. Can I help you any? My name is Will Reed."

"Mine is Pepper Blake," replied Pepper, returning the sign. "That fellow there," indicating the officer, "says we are under arrest."

"What have you been doing?" asked Will.

"Haven't been doing anything but riding along the road," explained Pepper. "He says we stole that automobile, as if we would want to steal that or anything else. What is the matter with him, crazy?"

"Oh, he has just been elected to office and thinks he's the whole thing," replied Will. "He will get over it after while."

"Well, he wants to get over it pretty quick," said Pepper, "or he will find there's a whole lot of trouble headed his way."

"How did it come about?" pursued Will.

When Pepper had told of their picking up the automobile and towing it in Will inquired, "Do you know anyone about here?"

"Isn't Riverview somewhere near here?" asked Pepper in turn.

"Riverview," repeated Will. "That's the Whildens' place. Do you know them?"

"Yes," replied Pepper. "We were on our way to visit them now."

"Who else is with you?" asked Will.

"Rand Peyton, Donald Graeme—" began Pepper.

"All right," cried Will, starting off on a run. "I'll be back again in a little while."

"Hey there, come back here!" called the officer after Will as he went off.

"All right!" shouted Will. "See you later."

"Who was he?" demanded the officer when he had counted his prisoners to see if they were all there. "Another one of your gang?"

To which none of the boys made any reply.

"Come along," went on the officer gruffly, hurrying them along the street to the Judge's office.

"What is the charge, constable?" asked the Judge when the boys had been arraigned before him. He was a tall, thin man with a sour expression, who evidently looked upon all boys with disfavor.

"Stealing an automobile, your honor," answered the officer.

"Stealing an automobile!" repeated the Judge.

"My! My! That is a very serious offense, young men, very serious, indeed. Better take their names, constable."

"Caught them with the goods on," explained the constable when the formality of taking their names had been gone through with. "You see there was a phone from Montville this morning that an automobile had been stolen, so I had an idea that the thieves might go through this way and I got right on the job and the fust thing you know they jest kem along with it and I took them in."

"Very good, very good, indeed," commended the Judge. "Caught them right in the act. Now then," turning to the boys, "what have you got to say for yourselves?"

Rand, as spokesman, then related the events of the morning.

"And so you were just out for a ride," observed the Judge sarcastically. "And you were going to call on the Whildens, too. I suppose they will be greatly disappointed when you do not come?"

"I can't say that, sir," replied Rand quietly, "but I know that they won't be pleased when they hear how we have been treated here."

"Do you insist upon the charge?" asked the Judge of the officer.

"Of course I do," replied the officer.

"Then I will have to hold you in five hundred dollars bail, each," decided the Judge a little less gruffly. "Do you think you can get it?"

"We can if we can send word home," answered Rand.

"We can leave our cycles," suggested Jack.

"I won't leave mine," declared Pepper.

"They probably stole them too, your honor," said the officer. "They are not to be trusted."

"You know we didn't!" cried Pepper hotly.

"Have you reason to think so?" the Judge asked of the officer.

"They were given us by —" broke in Pepper.

"Never mind, Pepper," advised Rand. "It isn't any use wasting time on explanations. They won't believe us. It will be all right as soon as we can get word to Uncle Floyd or Colonel Snow. I suppose we can send word to them," he added to the Judge.

"Who is that?" inquired the Judge.

"Mr. Floyd Scott, President of the Creston National Bank," replied Rand.

"Hem," considered the Judge. "Are you

quite sure you haven't made a mistake, constable?"

"Of course I am," replied the officer confidently. "They can't fool me. Shall I lock them up?"

"I suppose you will have to," agreed the Judge reluctantly, "unless they can get bail."

"I suppose I had better search them," suggested the officer.

"I wish that scout would come back," observed Pepper, "so we could get word home. It won't be pleasant for you when we do," he added to the constable.

"Oh, it won't, eh?" sneered the officer. "I think I will begin on you."

"That will do, constable," interposed the Judge. "You can dispense with that."

"Thank you, sir," said Rand. "This man apparently thinks he's Judge and all."

"Come along, then," returned the constable roughly. "I will put you in a safe place anyway."

CHAPTER III

A FRIEND IN NEED

THE constable had seized Pepper and was about to lead him to a cell in the basement of the building when the door of the room was thrown open and Will Reed with Frank and Nellie Whilden came hurrying in.

It was evident that the party arriving were well and favorably known to the presiding judiciary, and that he recognized their presence as an element not to be considered lightly in connection with the matter in hand. As soon as young Whilden appeared he was afforded an opportunity to speak.

“What is the meaning of this?” demanded Frank. “Good morning, Judge. How do you do, boys? What is the trouble here?”

“We have been arrested for stealing a motor car,” explained Rand.

“Stealing a motor car!” exclaimed Frank indignantly. “Why, that is preposterous. Who has been guilty of such a stupid blunder?”

"I believe he calls himself Constable Wayne," replied Rand.

"Perhaps there has been a mistake," admitted the constable, who had greatly changed his manner with the coming of the Whildens, and after Rand had gone over the story of the morning for Frank's benefit.

"I should think there has been and a pretty serious one, too," burst in Nellie.

"And I think Mr. Blake will make it decidedly unpleasant for you when he learns how you treated them at the garage," added Frank.

"And he said we stole our cycles, too," put in Pepper.

"Never mind, Pepper!" advised Rand, "that is all over now."

"I was only trying to do my duty," the constable endeavored to explain.

"Overdoing it you mean," insisted Frank. "Why didn't you investigate their story before you dragged them through the streets like criminals. If it hadn't been for Will Reed here, you would have locked them up. What about these boys, Judge? I will go on their bail to any amount."

"That isn't necessary, Mr. Whilden," replied

the Judge. "I think the constable will withdraw the charge."

"Certainly, your honor," assented the constable.

"And apologize to the boys for the way he treated them, too," added Frank, "though I don't know that they will accept it."

"Of course, Mr. Whilden," began the constable.

"As long as he acknowledges his mistake we won't ask any more," interrupted Rand. "Only he wants to be more careful next time."

"I am sorry that you got into this trouble through trying to do a kindness," went on Frank, "but we will try and make it up to you."

"The man said we would get paid for it and I guess we did," laughed Rand.

"Come on," broke in Pepper, "I've had enough of this, let's get out."

"Don't be in too much of a hurry, Pepper," said Gerald, as they followed him out. "You don't know what you may run into next."

"Well, it can't be any worse than this," retorted Pepper.

"Oh, yes, it might. But how did you get here just in time?" asked Donald, addressing Frank.

They were on the way back to the garage to secure possession of their cycles.

"Thanks to your young friend Will Reed," answered Frank. "He knew we were in the village, hunted us up to tell us of the trouble you had gotten into, and we came right along."

"We are ever so much obliged to him and you, too," said Rand.

On arriving at the garage they found there Mr. Allen the real owner of the car, who had been notified of its recovery by the constable.

"I hear that you have got my car and the thieves who took it," he said to the officer.

"Well," replied the constable, "I got the car."

"Where are the thieves?" went on Mr. Allen.

"Well," stammered the constable, "these boys had it in their possession."

"Well!" exclaimed Mr. Allen, "you certainly did make a mess of it. I sent word that it was taken by two men and you picked up six boys who were bringing it in."

"But I got the car," protested the constable.

"You didn't even do that," returned Mr. Allen. "The boys were bringing it to the garage when you found them and they are the ones to get the reward for its recovery."

"But we don't want any reward," objected Rand.

"You will permit me to be the judge as to that," said Mr. Allen. "I am very sorry that you have been subjected to so much annoyance on account of it and I am greatly obliged to you for bringing it in."

"Not at all," returned Rand, "we were glad to do it, but we didn't know that it had been stolen."

"Of course not," went on Mr. Allen, getting into the car which had been put in order at the garage. "But I am obliged just the same and you will hear from me later. Good-bye and good luck to you."

"Good-bye," called the boys in response as Mr. Allen drove away.

"We are ever so much obliged to you," said Pepper to Will Reed when they had got their cycles and were ready to start again. "We might have had a much more uncomfortable time if it had not been for your kindness."

"Not at all," replied Will. "I was only doing my scout duty. I was very glad to have a chance to help a brother scout. I know that you would have done as much for me."

"I most certainly would," asserted Pepper.

"And now," put in Nellie, "you are all going home with us. You too, Will, are included in the invitation."

"Why, you see, Miss Nellie," hesitated Will.

"No, I don't see," replied Nellie. "You get in our car and come along with us."

"Better do as she says, Will," advised Frank. "She always has her way, you know."

"But—" protested Will.

"Buts are not in order now," insisted Nellie. "We are having a little fête on the grounds to-day for the boys and girls of the neighborhood and you have all come just at the right time to take part."

"Perhaps it would be better if we came some other time," demurred Donald.

"There isn't any better time than now," declared Nellie quickly. "They have all heard of you and they'll be awfully glad to meet you."

"B-b-but I s-s-say," stammered Pepper in dismay. "We d-d-don't want to be put on exhibition, you know."

"That's all right," laughed Frank, "we won't put any tags on you."

"I know," went on Nellie, "we will just have

a splendid time. We are going to have all kinds of out-door games."

"We are very sorry to have kept you away from it," apologized Rand.

"Oh, that doesn't matter," declared Nellie, "for it doesn't start until afternoon."

"Oh, s-s-say," began Pepper.

"What is it now?" asked Jack.

"M-m-monkey Rae," stammered Pepper.

"What about him?" demanded Rand.

"He just went around the corner," answered Pepper. "T-that a sure enough sign of trouble."

"Who or what is Monkey Rae?" demanded Nellie.

There was no immediate answer to the question, but one of the party at least was determined to confirm Pepper's assertion that it was in truth Monkey Rae.

"It was him all right," reported Gerald who had jumped on his cycle and sped to the corner in time to see Monkey disappearing in the distance. "I'd like to know what he is doing here."

"Same as he did in Creston, I suppose," opined Jack, "playing monkey tricks."

"You haven't told me who he is," pouted Nellie. "Who is Monkey Rae?"

"He is a boy who used to live in Creston," explained Donald. "Our crowd get along with him better when we are far apart."

"But why is he a sign of trouble?"

"Because there is always mischief afoot when he is around," answered Pepper.

"Faith, and it generally comes to a head, too," put in Gerald, rubbing his own head as he thought of the rap that Monkey had given him on a previous occasion.

"Whatever do you mean?" asked Nellie. "Tell me about him."

"Sure, it's too long a tale to be telling now," explained Gerald. "You'd think there was no end to it."

"Then we had better not wait for it," concluded Nellie. "But I want to hear all about it before you go back."

"Then it is time we were getting away," advised Frank, starting the car. "All aboard for Riverview."

"We will follow the leader," called Pepper, as the party mounted their motor cycles and pushed after the swiftly-moving car.

The Whildens' place was but a short distance from the town and the run was quickly made. Here the boys received a hearty welcome from Mrs. Whilden and Nellie's sister Florence.

"Perhaps you boys would like to interview the bath tub," suggested Frank, to which they all acquiesced, and an agreeable transformation was effected when the six comrades next presented themselves on the verandah.

After luncheon, to which the boys did ample justice, they were taken under the guidance of Frank and Nellie, through the stables to see the prize horses and cows, then around the grounds, which were park-like in extent, and finally to a high rock on the river front from which a view of the Hudson for miles in either direction was to be had and from which the place derived its name.

"I see you shoot," remarked Rand on their way back as they passed a target standing on a stretch of lawn.

"A little," replied Nellie. "Do you?"

"Less, I think," responded Rand.

"All of you?"

"We all shoot," acknowledged Rand, "but we don't always hit the mark."

"Bow or gun?" went on Nellie.

"Both," answered Donald. "Speaking for myself I shoot with one as well as the other."

"That's right, Don," commended Jack, "you couldn't shoot worse with either than you do."

"In my opinion," rejoined Donald, "you are no overmuch of a marksman yourself."

"That's splendid," interjected Nellie, "I mean that you shoot," she laughingly corrected. "We are going to have an archery contest and you can all take part. And then we will have a rifle match and you can try that, too."

"Faith, there is no harm in trying even if you don't come within a mile of it," assented Gerald.

The guests had now begun to arrive and the boys were introduced to a number of boys and girls with whom they soon fraternized, particularly as there were several Boy Scouts among them.

The first athletic event of the afternoon was a half mile foot-race in which Dick, Gerald and Pepper were persuaded to enter and which Dick won by a small margin.

This was followed by the archery contest in which there were a number of contestants. The first round of three arrows allowed to each one

taking part was quickly shot. Of the Uncas band only Rand, Don and Jack hit the target, the arrows of the others going wild. Rand and Nellie made the best shots, each planting two arrows in the inner ring at about the same distance from the center.

"I think Miss Nellie's is closer to the center," concluded Rand after looking at the target.

"It is a tie," decided Frank who was acting as Master of Games. "It will have to be shot off. Go and get me an apple," he directed one of the smaller boys, who hurried away to return presently with a large red apple. "Oh, that won't do," said Frank, "it is twice too big; why they couldn't miss it if they wanted to. Take it back and get me another one.

"That's better," he went on a few moments later when the boy had returned with a smaller one. "We are now going to have a lifelike representation of William Tell shooting the apple from his son's head. Any of you want to play the part of Tell's heroic son? Well then, as no one seems anxious to volunteer for the part, this will have to serve," placing the apple on top of the target. "Now, Rand, show us how Tell did it."

Taking his place in front of the target, Rand shot his arrow which whistled through the air just grazing the apple, upon which there were shouts of approval.

"Faith, I'd be sorry for the boy if you was his father," commented Gerald.

"A most excellent shot," declared Frank.
"Now, Nellie, see if you can better it."

Taking her place Nellie drew back her bow and almost without seeming to take aim let fly an arrow which transfixed the apple through the center.

"Sure, that's the shot that Tells!" cried Gerald. "If you would like to shoot one from my head 'tis at your service."

"Better not, Gerald," advised Jack, "she might mistake it for the apple."

"Then it would be the appleplexy I'd be getting," returned Gerald.

"Have you got a tin can anywhere around?" asked Gerald of Frank a few minutes later.

"A tin can," repeated Frank. "What kind of a can do you want?"

"Oh, any kind will do," replied Gerald.

"I guess we can find one," said Frank.
"What do you want to do with it?"

"Wait and see," answered Gerald mysteriously. "This is more telling than Tell."

Going to the stable with Frank, Gerald presently returned with a small can which he suspended from the bough of a tree by a string while the others watched him, curious to know what was coming next.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," announced Gerald bringing forward Dick who reluctantly hung back. "As revivals are in order we will now have an exhibition of sling throwing by the modern David, Master Dick Wilson."

Bowing low in response to the applause which greeted this statement Gerald pushed Dick to the front with the adjuration:

"Now, Dick, for the honor of the Uncas show what you can do with the caveman's weapon."

Taking a sling and a handful of pebbles from his pocket, Dick took a position about twenty yards from the can and adjusting a stone in the sling let it fly at the target which it just missed. A second stone was shot with better aim, striking fairly on the can and then followed one stone after another so rapidly that it sounded almost like a continuous rattle until a dozen shots had been sped.

The applause was so great over this novelty in shooting that Dick was required to repeat it, retiring precipitately when he had finished.

After an interval, during which Dick was besieged and entreated by the other boys to show them how to do it, the rifle match followed. In this, much to his own as well as to his comrades' surprise, Pepper was the winner, planting two of his three bullets fairly in the center of the target.

"Faith," commented Gerald, "'tis betther to be born lucky than handsome."

Gerald had scarcely finished speaking when there came a series of piercing screams from another part of the grounds.

"Begorrah, Oi whonder phat it is now?" exclaimed Gerald.

"Mad dog! Mad dog!" shouted the children, scattering in all directions as a big white, mongrel dog appeared dashing across the lawn growling and snapping as he came. Straight across the green he sped in a direct line to where Pepper and the others were standing about the target. With wild cries of alarm, the group fled in different ways in hopes of escape; the frenzied animal rushing blindly on until as he neared

them he seemed to single out a girl in a pale yellow dress and start in pursuit of her.

“Shoot him! Kill him!” shouted the boys, and those who still had the guns in their hands with which they had been shooting began firing, to the much greater danger of each other than to the dog which was rapidly gaining upon the girl.

Waiting until it was well within range Pepper, who had retained his coolness through all the excitement, taking deliberate aim fired upon the animal just as it was about to spring upon the girl. The bullet sped true striking the dog fairly in the head and tumbling it in a heap on the ground as the girl dropped in a faint a dozen feet beyond.

“Good boy, Pepper!” cried Gerald. “That’s the best shot you ever made and you’ll never equal it. You brought them both down at the one fire.”

Commendations were showered thick and fast upon the boy and he was the observed of all observers.

Pepper looked about for an avenue of escape, but the others crowded around him with congratulations and effectually prevented him from

getting away before Nellie came bringing the girl whom the dog had been chasing, and who had been revived from the fainting spell by Mrs. Whilden.

"Here is someone who wants to thank you, Pepper," said Nellie.

But instead of speaking the girl put her arms about Pepper's neck and kissed him.

"Great s-s-snakes!" stammered Pepper, backing off and seeking shelter behind Rand. "All the trouble seems to come my way."

CHAPTER IV.

A TILTING TOURNAMENT

“**W**HERE did it come from?” asked Frank when the confusion had subsided and the body of the dog had been removed. “It is a strange dog to me.”

“What did I tell you about Monkey Rae?” put in Pepper.

“What in the world has Monkey Rae got to do with it?” demanded Frank.

“I don’t just know,” answered Pepper, “but it is the same dog that was with him and chased me once in the woods.”

“But I don’t see how he got here,” said Frank.

The confusion and panic following the coming of the dog was so great that it threatened a sudden ending of the fête and it required all the efforts of Mrs. Whilden, Florence and Nellie, assisted by the boys, to restore any degree of calmness.

To turn the thoughts of the company away from the recent peril, a tilting tournament, in

which the final victor was to have the privilege of naming one of the girls as Queen of Honor, was proposed by Frank.

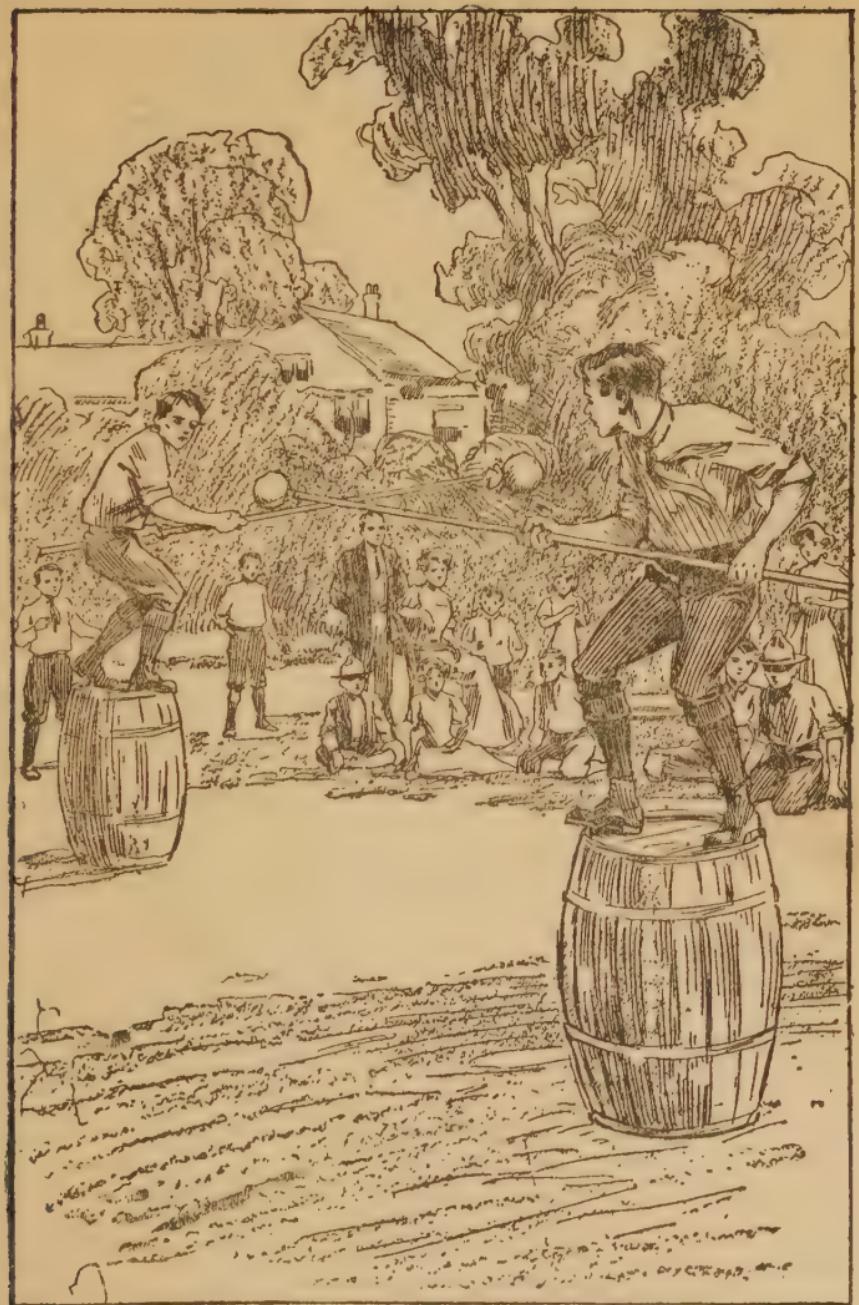
In this form of contest, which was held upon the lawn, two barrels were set upright about eight feet apart. Upon the heads of these stood the contestants, who were armed with bamboo poles eight feet long, with padded ends of wool.

With these weapons each knight endeavored to push his opponent off the barrel while retaining his own position, the victor in each round holding his place against all comers until overthrown or his opponents were all defeated.

At the beginning Rand took his stand upon one of the barrels and, after Dick and Gerald, who had been chosen as heralds, had sounded a parley upon their bugles, issued his challenge to any knight to contest his claim to the title of Champion of the Tilting Field.

His challenge was quickly taken by a half a dozen aspirants, but Will Reed was given the first opportunity and immediately mounted to the top of the other barrel.

“Ready,” called Frank; then as the two stood with their lances poised awaiting the signal, he shouted, “Go!”



"A PRETTY PLAY OF STROKE AND THRUST."

The lances clashed and they struck each other so squarely and equally that neither was moved from his place. Then followed a pretty play of stroke and thrust as each strove to force his opponent off his barrel. The two were well matched and the struggle continued for several minutes, the partisans of each encouraging them with their cries.

“Well thrust, Rand!”

“You’ve got him, Will!”

“A little harder, Rand!”

“That’s the way, good boy, Will!”

The two tottered and swayed upon their barrels, sometimes most ludicrously, now one and now the other upon the verge of going off, then recovering his footing and starting anew until Rand by a lucky stroke forced his opponent to the ground.

After a brief interval of rest the bugles again sounded a parley and Rand issued another challenge which was quickly accepted and another contest followed in which Rand was again the victor. This was repeated for several more rounds until Donald succeeded in overthrowing him and was acclaimed the victor.

For several rounds Donald maintained his po-

sition, but was finally overthrown and so the sport continued until Pepper, who was nearly the last to enter, holding his place until the close, was declared champion and crowned with a wreath of laurel by Nellie and bidden name the Queen of Honor.

"Better pick out the girl in yellow," whispered Gerald, "and maybe you will get another kiss."

"Maybe you would like one yourself," returned Pepper.

"Sure you're a dead shot to-day, Pepper," admitted Gerald. "Faith, ye'll never find me turning me back on a pretty girl nor an ugly boy."

But Pepper dodged the question by selecting Nellie as the Queen.

"Come, boys, come," called Rand a few minutes later, "it's time we were on our way."

"Why, I thought you were going to make us a visit," demurred Nellie.

"What do you call this?" asked Rand.

"Oh, this is merely an afternoon call," replied Frank, "and you positively cannot go until after supper."

"And beside you have to dance the first dance with me," added Nellie to Pepper, "if I am the Queen. We are going to have a dance on the

verandah as soon as it is dark. Won't that keep you?"

"But then it will be too dark to go," objected Pepper.

"Oh, you are not afraid to go home in the dark, I know," returned Nellie, "and if you are," she added, "you will have to stay all night."

"But we really should be going," protested Rand. "What do you say, Don?"

"In my opinion," replied Donald, "a few minutes either way is a matter of no moment."

"In my opinion," drawled Rand, "it is a matter of some moments. But I see you want to dance, so I suppose we will have to stay a while."

"That's right, Don," commended Nellie, "and I will see that you have the prettiest girl here as a partner."

"And what am I to do, Miss Nellie?" asked Gerald.

"What is troubling you?" asked Pepper.

"Why, Miss Nellie is going to dance with you," replied Gerald, "and the next prettiest girl she is going to pick out for Don."

"I think you must carry a bit of the blarney stone around with you," laughed Nellie. "I must see what I can do for you."

"There is the girl in yellow," suggested Pepper a little maliciously.

"Faith, if she'd treat me as well as she did you, I'd be delighted," replied Gerald.

"Shall I tell her that?" asked Nellie.

"Sure, I'm able to speak for myself," responded Gerald.

It was some two hours later before the boys under the urging of Rand and Pepper got started away amid the remonstrances of their friends, against their going so early.

"Well," conceded Frank, "if you will insist upon going I suppose we will have to let you have your way. So it is good-bye and good luck."

"And be sure and come and see us soon again," called Nellie as they rode away.

CHAPTER V

A BAD BEGINNING

UPON leaving Riverview the boys decided to ride as far as Rockdale and stop for the night. At first, as the road was good, they rode quite rapidly, but as they came to a stretch of heavy woods they were obliged to travel more slowly as the darkness was so intense that, as Gerald expressed it, "It was piled up in chunks," and only the small portion of the road upon which the light of their lamps directly fell was visible.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Jack, who was riding close beside Rand, "I shall be glad when we get out of this. I imagine I see something in every shadow we come to."

"What would anyone be hiding in here for?" asked Rand.

"Waiting for us, I suppose," returned Jack with a laugh.

"Pooh!" said Rand. "If you are never in any more danger than you are now—"

"Hands up!" shouted a gruff voice out of the

darkness and as the boys almost involuntarily came to a stop a rough looking man stepped into the circle of light thrown by their lamps and covered them with a pistol which he held in his hand. There was clearly nothing for them to do but to obey the command so peremptorily given and Jack and Rand, dismounting from their cycles, stood by them waiting for the next order.

"What's the matter, Rand?" called Donald, who was riding just behind. "What are you stopping for?"

"Stay where you are!" commanded the man. "Go through them, Bill!" he directed his confederate, who now appeared in the light, "and see what they have got."

"Furies!" exclaimed the second man, "they are nothing but a lot of boys."

"Well, we'll take what they've got," returned the first speaker. "Every little helps."

"Huh!" grumbled the other, "I suppose you will be holding up baby carriages next for the nursing bottles."

"You'll need something more than that," retorted the first, "if you don't shut up and get to work."

"But the ones we are waiting for will be along

any time now," remonstrated the one called Bill.

"Hurry up, then, and get through with it," directed the other.

"Hand over what you have got and be quick about it," ordered the man, advancing upon Rand and Jack.

Rand was about to obey and hand over the money he had when there was a whiz through the air beside his head and the man with the pistol dropped to the ground, the pistol going off as he fell. Then with a sudden rush Pepper and Dick, who had come up unseen, sprang upon the man beside Rand and the three fell in a heap in the road.

"Quick, c-c-catch the other one before he g-g-gets away!" shouted Pepper, between gasps, as he and Dick rolled and tumbled around on the ground with the man they had tackled.

Not comprehending just what had happened Rand and Jack nevertheless ran to where the other man, who was still in a daze, was lying. He was just recovering his senses as the boys seized him and for a few moments a desperate fight was waged between them until with a violent effort the man succeeded in throwing Rand off, hurling him to the ground with such force that

he lay for a while stunned. As soon as he had thrown Rand the man hurled Jack to one side and was about to strike him with the butt of the pistol, when Donald, who had been dancing about, unable to get a hold, jumped in and bore him to the ground, where, with the aid of Jack and Gerald, he held him securely.

"Get his pistol, quick!" cried Jack to Rand, who by this time had managed to stagger to his feet, "then, if he doesn't keep quiet we will give him a dose of his own medicine."

Securing the pistol, the boys were now masters of the situation.

"How are you m-making out?" called Pepper from his side.

"We have got our man down," replied Rand.
"How are you doing?"

"We have g-g-got ours all right," answered Pepper. "B-but what b-b-bothers me is what are we g-g-going to do with them."

"Give it up," replied Rand, "unless we sit on them all night."

"Faith," put in Gerald, "'tis a bad lot of eggs ye'd be sitting on, Oi dunno."

The boys had been so much engrossed in their struggle with the highwaymen that none of them

had noticed the coming of an automobile until it was almost upon them.

“Hallo!” cried one of the men in the car.
“What’s going on here?”

Jumping from the car, which had stopped, two of the men who were in it ran to where Dick and Pepper were still struggling with their man.

“These men held us up and tried to rob us,” explained Pepper between gasps.

“Tain’t nothin’ of the kind,” contradicted the man. “Me and my pardner was just going to Morton when these young rascals jumped on us and tried to rob us.”

“That’s a likely story and does you credit,” returned the gentleman, looking the two men over. “I see,” he went on to the boys, “that you are wearing the scout uniform, and you must be all right. I think these are the men we were warned of, Clay,” addressing the man with him. “They knew we were coming this way, and were after the money we have.”

“And held up these boys just to keep their hand in, I suppose,” agreed Clay. “What shall we do with them?”

“Better take them along with us and lock them up,” replied the gentleman. “It’s lucky for

you," he went on to the prisoners, "that you didn't try it on us. We were on the lookout for you and brought two officers with us, who had orders to shoot on the minute if you attempted to hold us up. Take them in charge, Grady!"

Slipping handcuffs on them, the officers ordered the men to get into the car, which they suddenly did, the officers sitting beside them.

"I don't see how you got the best of them," remarked the gentleman when Rand had told the story of the holdup.

"I don't see, either," replied Rand. "The first thing I knew they had us covered with a pistol and were ordering us to give up what we had. Then the man with the pistol dropped in the road and somebody hallooed to jump on them, and that we did, which is all I know about it."

"That was Pepper's doings," explained Dick. "You see, Pepper and I were riding behind the others and when we were coming along we heard the shouting and thought there was something wrong. So Pepper said we'd put out our lights and sneak up and see what was going on, and so we crept up and they didn't know we were around until we jumped in and tackled them."

"But the man with the pistol Dick knocked

down with a stone from his sling," put in Pepper, "and that gave us the chance, and then you came and I guess that's all."

"And it seems to have been quite enough," commented the gentleman. "I want to congratulate you on the good fight that you put up and Pepper, whichever one of you that is, on his good generalship. You are none of you hurt? No, then we will get along. I needn't tell you to take care of yourselves, for you seem perfectly able to do that. We will take care of these fellows and see that they get what is coming to them. Good night."

"Good night," responded the boys. "You came along just in time."

"To take them off your hands," laughed the gentleman. "We were in late to share in the glory of their capture." Then getting into the car they continued on their way.

"Come on," urged Jack, "let's get out of here before anything more happens."

"Oh," responded Dick confidently, "there won't anything more happen to-night."

Which merely went to show, as later events proved, that Dick's foresight was not his strong point.

"What do you think we'd better do?" asked Rand when they had got through the woods and stopped for consultation. "Keep on for Rockdale, or camp here for the night?"

"I think we might camp here," proposed Dick, "it's so dark that we can't travel faster than a walk."

"Oh, keep on," urged Pepper. "There's the moon coming up and we will have light enough in a little while."

"Where's the moon?" asked Donald.

"Over there behind those trees," replied Pepper. "Don't you see the light?"

CHAPTER VI

THE RED Moon

“**T**HAT’S the queerest moon I ever saw,” remarked Gerald, after they had ridden a little way on the road.

“What is the matter with it?” demanded Pepper.

“Well,” replied Gerald, “I’ve heard of blue moons, but this is the first time I ever saw a red one.”

“That isn’t the moon,” cried Rand, “that’s the light from a fire. Let’s hurry, boys.”

The boys needed no urging, and increasing their speed, at the imminent risk of breaking their necks by a tumble from their cycles, they rode rapidly in the direction of the light which momentarily grew brighter. A few minutes brought them in sight of the burning building. It proved to be a fine country residence standing a couple of hundred feet back from the road. When they came nearer to it they saw that the front of the house was all ablaze and that the flames were bursting through the roof. There

were a number of men running about the grounds shouting to one another and others hastening across the fields from the neighboring places.

"Anybody in there?" called Rand, when they drew near. No one made any answer, although some of the men were frantically calling for a ladder.

Stacking their cycles by the barn the boys ran to the house, from which they could now hear cries for help coming. Guided by the sound, they ran to the back of the building, where a woman with a child was standing at a third story window and seemed upon the point of leaping out.

"Hold on!" shouted Rand, when he could be heard. "Wait a moment and we will help you down."

"Get a ladder, someone!" called Donald.

"There isn't any time to hunt for a ladder," responded Rand, "we will have to get along without it."

Springing up, he caught the casing above the back door and drew himself up until he got a partial foothold on the knob, then, reaching to the sill above, he climbed up to the window. From this point he made his way across to the middle

window, which was directly under the one where the woman was standing. Here he clung like a cat until he was joined by Pepper, who had followed him. Smashing in the window so that he could get a hold on the sash, Pepper thrust his arm through, and holding fast with the one hand, put his other arm about Rand and held him firmly so that he had both arms free.

Swinging himself out then as far as he dared, Rand called to the woman to let the child drop into his arms. All this was done in less time than takes the telling. For a moment the woman hesitated, then, as the smoke poured into the room, she lowered the child until it was almost in Rand's grasp and let go. Bracing himself as firmly as he could, Pepper was able to hold Rand securely while the latter caught the child, although the shock almost dislodged them from their precarious footing. It was now comparatively easy to pass the child to Jack, who was standing on a table, which he and Dick had dragged to a point just beneath them.

"Now, then," called Rand to the mother, when the child had been safely lowered to the ground, "climb out of the window and we will help you down."

"Oh, I can't, I can't," sobbed the woman, drawing back, but a burst of flame into the room drove her to the window again.

"Come! Come!" urged Rand, "we will catch you!"

Climbing upon the window sill, the woman seemed about to make the attempt, when she dropped back into the room again.

While she hesitated, Donald had made his way up by the other window, and was reaching out to help hold Rand, but when she fell back he started to climb up to the window where she had been standing.

"Hold on!" shouted Jack, "here comes the ladder!"

At the same instant two men came running with a ladder, which they placed against the side of the house, but which did not come within six feet of reaching the window. Putting it upon the table still left it some feet short, but Rand, swinging himself out, caught the ladder as soon as it was raised and working around, ran to the top by the time it was in position, with Jack but a second behind him. Climbing through the window into the smoke-filled room, Rand found the woman unconscious on the floor. Picking her

up he passed her, with the aid of Jack, through the window to Dick, who had followed them up the ladder, and who supported her until one of the men came up and helped to carry her down. Jack and Rand, who were almost overcome with the smoke, following more slowly. They had scarcely more than reached the ground when a volume of flame burst from the window where they had been.

The woman, who had been stifled by the smoke, soon revived under the care of some of the women of the neighborhood who had come to the scene, and when able to stand she was taken, with the child, to one of the nearby houses.

“I don’t know who you are or how you got here,” exclaimed Mr. Howell, the owner of the burning building. He had first thanked the boys again and again for what they had done. “If you had dropped from the skies you could not have gotten here at a better time or have done more than you have. I owe the lives of my wife and child to your quickness and courage.”

“Oh, we only tried to do what we could,” replied Donald. “We just happened to be riding along and saw the light of the fire and came in to see if we could help any.”

"You were more than a help," replied Mr. Howell, "for you did it all yourselves. It is a blessing that you happened along as you did."

"We are on our way to Rockdale," went on Donald. "It was a fortunate thing, though it didn't seem so at the time, that an accident on the road delayed us, or we would have been some miles farther on our way."

"It was a very fortunate thing for me," continued Mr. Howell. "I don't like to think of what might have happened if you had not come."

"Don't you think," interposed Rand, "that as we can't do anything more we should be getting along?"

"All right," responded Pepper. "There's the moon coming up, now."

"What is it, now," asked Gerald, "a really true moon or another fire?"

"It is a really true moon this time," decided Dick.

"Where are you going?" asked Mr. Howell.

"We were going to Rockdale," replied Pepper. "but it doesn't look as if we were ever going to get there."

"Why, that is a long way from here," interposed Mr. Howell. "I haven't much to offer you

in the way of accommodation," he added ruefully, "but I think some of my neighbors will take care of you for the night."

"What is the matter with sleeping in the barn?" asked Pepper.

"That would suit me," yawned Dick, "I think I could sleep on the hard side of a plank to-night."

"Me, too," joined in Pepper, "I'm not going any farther to-night."

"Better keep agoin'," urged Gerald.

"Not a bit of it," rejoined Pepper. "The farther we have gone to-day the worse it has got, and I'm going to stop right here."

Pepper's determination met with general approval, so, putting their wheels into an unused stall in the barn, the boys climbed up into the mow and were soon nestling down in the hay.

"We don't sleep on the ground when we have a comfortable bed," said Pepper, quoting the remark of Colonel Snow, "but say, this is—"

"What was that?" asked Gerald at a sudden noise, "somebody calling?"

"Oh, that was only Pepper sounding taps on his bugle," returned Jack.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT THE MORNING BROUGHT

THOROUGHLY tired from their long day, for it was nearly daylight when the boys crawled into the mow, they did not waken until late the next morning.

“I didn’t call you,” explained Mr. Howell, when they exclaimed over the time. “I knew you needed the sleep. We will have breakfast, such as it is, ready for you in a few minutes. It is a fortunate thing for us,” he went on, “that it is Summer time, for we shall have to live in the barn until I can get another house built.”

“There isn’t much left of the old one,” remarked Pepper, looking at the ruins which were still smoking.

“No, the fire made a pretty clean sweep,” replied Mr. Howell.

“How did it get afire?” asked Donald.

“I don’t know,” answered Mr. Howell. “When I awoke the whole house seemed to be ablaze and I called my wife and little girl to come and I thought they were right beside me with

the others. I didn't know that they were not following until I got outside and then the stairs were all ablaze and they could not get down."

"How is Mrs. Howell this morning?" asked Rand.

"There she is to speak for herself," laughed Mr. Howell, as the lady referred to called to them from the barn that breakfast was ready.

"And so am I," responded Pepper. "That's the scout motto, you know, always ready."

"For breakfast?" asked Mr. Howell.

"For whatever comes along," responded Pepper.

"I think you are," said Mr. Howell; "you certainly were last night."

The farmer then explained his plans for the immediate future. A sort of shop which had escaped the ravages of the flames would serve as sleeping quarters for himself and family. The barn was a structure of more than ordinary size and at one end he had constructed a kitchen well equipped for emergency use. Although his house was gone he was not badly off and need not avail himself of assistance offered by the neighbors.

After a hearty meal of biscuits, bacon, fresh

eggs and milk, the boys were ready to continue their trip.

"What's up now, Pepper?" demanded Rand a moment later, as the boy, too excited to get his words out, came rushing from the barn, wildly gesticulating, and ran to where the others were talking to Mr. and Mrs. Howell.

"T-t-there's only f-f-five!" stammered Pepper.

"Five what?" cried Jack.

"F-f-five cycles!" returned Pepper.

"Oh, pshaw!" interjected Jack, "you haven't got your eyes open yet, Pepper."

"T-there's only f-five," reiterated Pepper.
"Count them."

"Pepper is right," corroborated Jack, who had run on ahead. "There are only five."

"Whose is missing?" asked Rand.

"Mine doesn't seem to be here," replied Donald, who had been looking over the wheels.

"What did you do with it last night?" asked Mr. Howell.

"Put it there with the others," said Donald.

"It must be around somewhere," insisted Rand. "Sure you put it there?"

"I am no oversure of anything," conceded

Donald, "but I'm sure that is where I put it."

"Let's take another look around," suggested Mr. Howell; "it must be here somewhere."

But a thorough search of the barn failed to discover it.

"I am very sorry, Donald," said Mr. Howell when they finally gave up the search. "I don't see how it could have happened or what has become of it. But I will get you another one."

"No," protested Donald, "it was no fault of yours. Perhaps we may find it yet."

"I don't see," pondered Mr. Howell, "how it could have disappeared unless someone took it and I don't see how anyone could get away with it. It is certainly very strange."

"Perhaps we can trace it," suggested Dick. "It must have left a track if anyone rolled it away."

"But you couldn't tell that from any of the other tracks," objected Pepper.

"Can't tell until you try," urged Dick. "No harm in trying."

"No," admitted Pepper, "no harm in trying but —"

"Now don't butt in," returned Dick, "with any more objections. Who knows?"

"Here is a single track," announced Rand, "that starts across this field."

"Hurrah!" shouted Dick. "What did I tell you?"

"Which way does it lead?" called Pepper, who was already on his wheel. "Perhaps we can overtake the robber."

"Wait a minute, Pepper," called Rand, "until we decide what we are going to do."

"Why, there isn't anything to do but get after him as quickly as we can, is there?" asked Pepper.

"Well, there are only five cycles," replied Rand, "and —"

"We are six," broke in Gerald. "Therefore somebody must walk."

"I see," replied Pepper, jumping from his wheel, "but the question is, who shall that someone be?"

"In my opinion," began Donald, "it would no be —"

"To toss up for it," interjected Jack.

"Oh, that will take too long," remonstrated Pepper. "Count out, Rand."

"That's it," cried the others. "Let's see who will be it."

"Very well," responded Rand, "if I can remember the rhyme. How does it go?"

"Inte, minte," began Pepper.

"That's it," responded Rand. "I know now, inte, minte, cute corn, apple seeds and briar thorn, briar thorn and limber lock, three geese in a flock, one flew east and one flew west, and one flew over the cuckoo's nest, O U T out, with a ragged dish clout, out," ending with Gerald. "I am sorry for you, Gerald, but you are the victim to be offered up."

"Of course," replied Gerald. "As me noble ancistor said, 'Twas ever thus from childhood's hour, I've seen my fondest hopes decay.' Shure, I've no luck at all, at all. I cu'dn't aven catch the measles except in vacation."

"Hurry up, boys, and let's get off," urged Pepper.

"Wait a moment, boys," said Mr. Howell. "Mrs. Howell is putting up some lunch for you to take along. You may have a long chase before you. You want to be careful too, boys, and I think if you find the thief you had better notify the Sheriff. If you have any trouble, come back and I will go with you."

"All right," responded Rand, as the five rode

off and Gerald, who was looking wistfully after them was left to await their return.

The trail, which was not difficult to follow, led across a field to the main road and thence back over the road that they had traveled the night before for a considerable distance, finally off through a cross road until it came to an edge of the woods of the forty miles' wilderness. Here all signs failed and no point could be determined upon as that at which the rider of the missing cycle had dismounted.

CHAPTER VIII

A TALE OF THE NORTHLAND

WHEN his comrades had finally disappeared from view along the winding road Gerald turned disconsolately away. Though of a cheerful disposition and inclined to look on the bright side of things, the prospect of a long day in strange surroundings without his companions did not appear inviting and the time dragged interminably. He explored the farm, petted the horses, poked in the ruins, and for a while assisted Mr. Ford and the hands, who were trying to bring order out of chaos. Still it was yet a long way from noon.

“ Faith, 'twill be next week before the day is over,” he said to himself, as he wandered down to the gateway for the dozenth time to look up the road.

Coming back to the barn he took a seat on a stone. Then his attention was attracted to a man who was strolling, as it occurred to Gerald, up the driveway from the road. He was large and

much taller than Gerald, with a round, apple-like face with rosy-red cheeks and bright blue eyes in which lurked a twinkle. There was no mistaking his nationality, if there was doubt about his age, which might be anywhere from thirty to a hundred. If he lived to be a thousand the spirit of the "ould sod" would still be strong within him. Walking gravely beside him was a large collie who apparently took upon himself the duty of looking after the man.

"Good mohrning, Mister Ford," said the newcomer, when he came up to where the farmer and his men were at work. "'Tis a foine morning the day."

"Good morning, Denny," responded Mr. Ford, shaking hands with the man and then with the dog which had gravely offered his paw. "Good morning, Cæsar." This the dog acknowledged with several short barks.

"Mr. Denny Blake," went on Mr. Ford, "this is Master Gerald Moore; and this," turning to the dog, who offered Gerald his paw, "is Cæsar Blake."

"Glad to make your acquaintance," said Gerald, shaking the paw.

"This is one of the young gentlemen that came

to our help last night," went on Mr. Ford.

"Shure, Oi heard about that," returned Mr. Blake. "'Tis a foine bhoy ye are, and it's a foine name ye have. Is it wan av the O'More of County Donegal ye are?"

"Faith, Oi dunno," replied Gerald, dropping into the dialect; "but if it is we have made more of the name than they did."

"'Tis fond of yere fun ye are," said Mr. Blake, taking a seat upon the stone which Gerald had vacated, "and 'tis like me ould comrade, O'More were his name, and a foine strapping lad he were. God rest his soul."

"Is he dead?" asked Gerald.

"Faith, he wasn't the lasht toime Oi saw him," replied Mr. Blake; "but that was a long toime ago, and he may be dead a half-a-dozen times since then. Or it may be 'tis a savage he is by this toime, wid feathers in his hair."

"How is that?" asked Gerald.

"'Tis a long sthory," replied Mr. Blake, "an' I must be goin' now, but you get Mister Ford to be after telling it."

After the Irishman and his dog had departed, as it was the noon hour, the farmer was glad to rest himself from his arduous labor, and impor-

tuned by Gerald, consented to tell the tale of adventure which concerned his neighbor and himself.

Gerald threw himself down upon the ground, prepared to listen to the story.

"Did you ever hear of Rupert's Land?" asked Mr. Ford.

"It's away up in Canada, isn't it?" replied Gerald.

"Ay, ay, lad; 'tis more than a thousand miles beyond Canada, deep in the uninhabited wilds of the North. There, in a bleak, desolate part of Rupert's Land, so far removed from the haunts of civilized man that its inhabitants get their mail but twice a year. It were there that Dennis and I, in the days of our foolishness, found our way.

"We had been acquaintances, Dennis and I, from my early boyhood. Although he was much the older of the two, we ran away together. I do not know who was the most to blame, I guess each was equally culpable. We wanted to see the world and, arriving in Boston, we shipped, I as cabin-boy and he as a helper, on a whaling ship. There were hardships galore and finally, months later away up in the frozen north, the vessel became stranded, and the ice floes closed in and

held it a prisoner. Nothing could be done until the following spring although we were never in any great danger.

“ After a time the two of us, Denny and I, made our way to a station called a fort, to which we were directed by some natives. Let me picture to you the spot.

“ The outpost consisted of four small log-houses, or huts, the doors and windows of which are of the smallest possible size and number. A rude stockade surrounds the whole, and a flag-staff rises in the midst. The trader in charge calls it the ‘fort,’ and the custom of the country bears him out in this misnomer. Perhaps the stockade and the flagstaff may have suggested the title. No guns frown from the ramparts of this wooden fortress of the north; no martial music echoes in the yard; and the garrison consists of the commandant, four men, an Indian hunter of the Chippewyan tribe, and one Indian woman.

“ All around the fort, from Labrador to the Pacific, from Canada to the Pole, is a wide wilderness, almost tenantless, and wrapped in the deep solitude with which it was invested at creation. A few scattered tribes of Indians there are, and wild beasts in plenty, but no signs of

civilized man, except the wooden forts of the fur-traders, which, few and far between, are scattered over the country. In this region, winter lasts for nearly eight months in the year. The keen winds of the north, fresh and bitter from the ice-fields of the arctic seas, sweep over the fields in wild fury. Snow is the prominent feature in the scene. The land is buried in it; the housetops are weighted down by it; the branches of the surrounding pine-trees are laden with it, and heavy wreaths curl over and cling to the adjacent cliffs. It blocks up the windows, and fills the keyholes, and tips each individual post in the stockade with white. Everything large is covered with it and rounded in outline; everything small is buried, overwhelmed, obliterated with snow.

“It was a desolate spot, yet not so cheerless as you would imagine.

“Going out one bright and sparkling winter morning with Mr. Wellwood, the commandant at Stoney Creek, on the chase —’twas the only way to get anything to eat in those lands. You had need of plenty of clothes and we had on a deer-skin coat and trousers, blue cloth leggings, moccasins, a fur cap, formed somewhat like a helmet,

an ample shawl round our necks. Throwing our guns over our shoulders, we came to the little hut where we lived.

“‘Hullo! Dinny, are ye there?’ he cried, stooping as he looked in at the low doorway.

“‘Ay, ay, yer honor; jist at your sarvice,’ answered Dinny, as he drained a large bowl of tea and sprang to his feet.

“‘Get your gun and snow-shoes, Dinny; we’ll follow up the deer track that was discovered yesterday. Tell the Squirrel to get ready to go with us, and don’t forget your sled. I’ll walk on.’

“In a few minutes we were joined by Dinny and an Indian, tall of stature and stout of limb. We followed at a rapid pace along the woodcutter’s track, which was well beaten by the men in hauling firewood to the fort. In half-an-hour we reached the termination of the track, and the little hut of the woodcutters. Here we halted to put on our snow-shoes.

“‘They’re mighty convanient things, to be sure, though rayther troublesome at times,’ muttered Dinny, as he endeavored to force his feet into the lines of his snow-shoes.

“‘You’d travel but a short way without them,

Dinny,' said Wellwood: 'the snow is five feet deep, if it's an inch; even *your* long legs would fail to find bottom.'

"Did ye ever walk on snow-shoes? There's pleasanter ways of traveling, my boy," and Gerald shook his head. "They are awkward-looking and their looks are not deceiving. Dinny was a big heavy man, and was fond of coming out strong on all occasions — two facts which induced him to wear a headdress with a pair of horns, and to select the largest pair of snow-shoes at the establishment. They were fully six feet long by a foot and a half broad, and supported their burly wearer well on the surface of the snow, but proved rather troublesome at times among the thick bushes.

"Now then, Squirrel," said Wellwood, "do you strike off to the left and make a long circuit towards the blasted pine on the hill-top: you know the place, and the rest of us will bear away to the right, and if we don't start the moose we'll meet you there."

"Dinny threw the line of his light sledge across his shoulder and we followed the master into the forest. The country was pretty level, and comparatively free from underwood, so that we pro-

ceeded rapidly and with ease over the snowy waste. The air was perfectly calm, and the frost intense, causing our breath, which issued like steam from our mouths, to congeal upon our hair and breast in the form of hoar-frost. Threading the way among the trees and bushes, we traversed many a mile of ground without seeing a single deer-track. Towards the afternoon when we got into a more thickly wooded country, and turning to the left, round the base of a little knoll, we came upon a small stream whose waters had long ago been frozen to the bottom.

“ ‘Ha! Dennis,’ said the master, ‘we’ll make use of the river here, and get a little relief from our snow-shoes.’

“ ‘It’s a road o’ nature’s own makin’,’ remarked Dennis, taking off the shoes, ‘an’ a very purty one too; jist like a marble pavement.’

“ In a few minutes we were striding over the hard coating of snow that lay upon the frozen stream.

“ While we were thus pursuing our way, the Indian pushed forward in a devious circuit towards the place of meeting at the blasted pine. For several hours he did not halt, or slacken the

pace at which he had set out. Threading his way among the bushes with a rapidity and ease that showed he had been accustomed to tread the forest from infancy, turning swiftly aside when any obstacle presented itself, and insinuating the unwieldy snow-shoes through little openings in the underwood that seemed to bid defiance to his further progress, or treading down by main force the smaller bushes in his path, while his keen eye turned restlessly on all sides, noting every object in the way, the Squirrel traveled steadily until the sun was low, but discovered no fresh tracks of deer. Then, turning sharp to the right, he made for the place of rendezvous. Suddenly his eye was arrested by tracks in the snow: a glance sufficed to show that they were those of an old moose and two young ones. Throwing his gun into the hollow of his left arm, the Squirrel proceeded more cautiously, following the tracks, which led over the summit of a small eminence.

“ Ascending this, he was about to push down the opposite side, when he stopped short, and his eyes glistened as he gazed before him, for down in the hollow beyond stood the objects of his desire — a magnificent moose, as large as a horse,

with her two young ones beside her. The distance, however, was too great for a shot, and the Indian was endeavoring to approach nearer, when a little puff of white smoke burst from the bushes on his right. It was followed by a loud report; one of the young animals leapt its own height from the ground, and the next instant its life-blood dyed the snow, while the other two sprang up the bank, over the brow of the hill, and disappeared, followed by two well-intended but ill-directed shots from Wellwood and Dennis, who dashed forward in pursuit.

“ So hot was Dennis in the chase, that he totally forgot the sledge, which was bounding and tumbling behind him, until the line got twisted round his snow-shoes and brought him head foremost to the ground. He had come down with such a plunge that his head and shoulders, and indeed the greater part of his body, were buried in the snow, from which he struggled in vain for a long time to extricate himself; while his projecting feet and legs, the enormous snow-shoes, the tangled lines, and the overturned sledge, wriggled helplessly on the surface. Deep down did he plunge his hands, but no bottom could be found; the yielding snow offered no resistance to the

thrusts of his arms as he endeavored to raise himself, and the shoes to which his feet were attached prevented him from drawing his legs under him. At length, by dint of beating the snow hard in his violent struggles, he succeeded in gaining a sitting posture, in which he remained for about five minutes, clearing the snow out of his eyes, neck, wrists, and hair, and growling all the while in an undertone at his misfortune.

“Having gathered himself up, he buried the young deer to protect it from the wolves, picked up his gun, which was crammed to the muzzle with snow, and started off in pursuit of his companions. But they were far distant now, following hard upon the track of the deer. A stern chase is proverbially a long one, and Dinny found it so. The sun sank, and the shades of night soon covered the forest with the deepest gloom. A few shooting streaks of the aurora, however, played athwart the northern sky, serving to render darkness visible, and to light the lonely traveler on his way. The track of his comrades guided him, but hour after hour passed and still he failed to overtake them. At length, just as he was beginning to vent his impatience in grumbling, a bright flame sprang up before him,

and a shower of sparks flew over the tree tops. In another minute the Irishman was seated before the blazing camp-fire, filling his very short and intensely black little pipe—a necessary indulgence in these regions—with tobacco, while his master quizzed him in regard to his performances as a tumbler, and the Squirrel prepared supper.

“The second young moose had been overtaken and killed, and large steaks thereof were now roasting before the blaze. The sledge was unpacked; a tin kettle was stuffed full of snow and placed on the fire, and tea was speedily produced.

“It is a bright, cheery, beautiful, sparkling thing, a winter encampment in the snow. The camp-fire was a blazing pile of logs, five feet long, three feet broad, and two feet deep. It was large enough to roast an ox whole, yet it was not more than sufficient to warm the atmosphere of the encampment. So intense was the frost that, standing one foot distant from the glowing heap of logs, you could feel your back freezing while the front of your trousers was being singed. A spreading pine had been selected as a shelter for the night. From the foot of this the snow had been cleared with extemporized shovels out of

snow-shoes. The ground was laid bare for a space of fifteen feet in diameter. The sides of this hole formed walls six feet high. The fire was kindled at one end, the blankets were spread out at the other, and the flat pine branches formed a thick impenetrable ceiling.

“How that fire did roar, to be sure! The forked flames licked and curled round the thick logs with a glib and hungry ferocity that would have led one to suppose fire was a starved element in these cold regions, and seldom had the luck to grasp so large a meal. The smoke curled upwards in thick volumes, and vanished in the dark night. Then a lurid sheet of flame cleft the rolling mass asunder — another and another fork flew up, scattering the smoke right and left.

“Now then, Dennis, pass the tea, and don’t eat too much, else we’ll never be able to waken you. Two hours is all the sleep we can afford to take.”

“Dennis was too deeply engaged with venison steaks to be able to reply — and handed the tin can of tea to the master, who drank the refreshing beverage from the *lid*. Dennis and the Squirrel took turns from the can.

“Squirrel, are ye ready to turn in, avic?” in-

quired Dennis, with a plethoric and most expressive sigh.

“ The Indian, who indulged in the taciturnity of his race, gave forth a sound which might have meant anything, but for the accompanying nod, which proved it to be affirmative, and with a pile of branches for a pillow we all lay down. The Indian stretched himself beside us, and spread a green blanket over himself and us, tucked it tight in all around us, under our feet and over our heads, and so we went to sleep like a long green bolster. Mr. Wellwood followed our example. The neglected fire soon burned down, burst up once or twice in a fitful blaze, and finally went out, leaving the camp in total darkness and in profound silence.

“ At the end of two hours the Squirrel was up and roused the rest of us and blew a last latent spark, that had survived the night, into a flame. We were soon ready to renew the chase. A mouthful of cold tea and a bite of cold venison were speedily despatched, and, in ten minutes or so, we were gliding rapidly through the woods in silence, while the moon lighted the path and enabled us to follow the track of the moose deer. But the day had dawned, and we were beginning

to think of breakfast, before we overtook it. Wellwood was in advance, and was about to pass over the brow of a small hill, when his eye fell on the object of our hot pursuit. In a second, the report of his fowling-piece awoke the echoes; the whistling bullet sped to its mark, and the startled animal, bounding up the bank, disappeared over the top of a mound.

“‘Hurrah! come on, lads,’ he shouted, as he dashed forward in pursuit.

“‘Ye’ve missed it,’ growled Dennis.

“‘The deer is hit,’ said the Indian, gravely, as he strode after his friends.

“The Squirrel was right. On reaching the spot where the moose had been standing, blood was found on the snow, and in a quarter of an hour the animal was again overtaken. It was evidently much hurt, for it floundered heavily in the deep snow.

“‘Now then, Dennis, be ready with a second shot,’ he called, raising his gun. Just as he pressed the trigger the moose stumbled and disappeared, while a cloud of white snow flew up into the air. Lowering his piece, and uttering an exclamation of surprise, he hurried forward. Suddenly he halted, and we were about to ad-

vance, but Dennis waved us back for he saw that the master was standing on a snow-wreath that curled over the brink of a precipice several hundred feet deep. He was beyond the edge of the cliff, and the tenacity of the snow alone preserved him from instant destruction.

“ The uncertain morning light caused the snow-plain beneath to appear on the same level with that above, so that the deer had been deceived, and its mangled remains now lay scattered on the rocks far below. We almost shared its fate. The master was in extreme peril. To retreat backwards was impossible, owing to the form of his snow-shoes. To turn was almost equally impossible, for the exertion necessary to do so would in all probability break off the wreath and hurl him into the yawning abyss.

“ ‘ Och, master dear, jump back and kitch me hand ! ’ cried Dennis, in a hoarse whisper, advancing cautiously.

“ Wellwood drew a long breath, made a desperate backward bound, and fell upon the snow as he grasped the outstretched hand of Dennis. The effort broke off the mass of snow, which went thundering down the precipice. So narrow was the escape, that Wellwood rested upon the

extreme edge of the cliff, and one of his snow-shoes dangled over it; but with a strong pull we hauled him back to safety."

The story of the Irishman was ended and Gerald's only regret was that his chums had not also been privileged to hear the tale as told by Mr. Ford.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE WILDERNESS

“WELL, what next?” asked Jack.

“Make a search of the woods, I suppose,” replied Rand. “The trail has brought us here, what else can we do?”

“In my opinion,” observed Don, looking at the forest which presented a tangled mass of undergrowth and was dark and forbidding in appearance even by daylight, “’twill be much like looking for a needle in a haystack.”

“Well, I suppose you could find that if you looked long enough,” said Dick.

“I will no contradict you,” returned Donald, “if you had the patience of Job and the years of Methusalam.”

“In my opinion,” put in Pepper, “you would have no trouble in finding the needle if you sat down on it.”

“Well, we can have a look, anyhow,” suggested Jack.

“Oh, aye,” agreed Donald, “no doubt you can look.

"But we can't take our cycles into these woods," objected Dick.

"We can leave them here while we go in," proposed Rand.

"And then there was none," sang Pepper.

"I didn't mean to leave them here alone," retorted Rand. "Somebody can stay with them."

"And who will that somebody be?" demanded Jack.

"That reminds me—" began Dick.

"No, it don't," interrupted Donald, "remember the wildcat you reminded. We don't want anything jumping on us here."

"Who will stay?" broke in Jack.

"Toss up for it," proposed Donald.

"We will draw lots," decided Rand, picking up some small twigs of different lengths. "The one drawing the longest will be elected to stand guard over the wheels."

"Me for the wheels," said Jack, finding that he had drawn the longer twig.

"If anything happens sound your bugle and we will come back at once," directed Rand to Jack when they left him.

"We are certainly on the wrong track," de-

cided Dick, after they had toiled for a time through the heavy underbrush up the steep sides of the hill. "Only a jackass would drag a motor-cycle up a hill like this."

"Why, you didn't try to bring yours up, did you?" asked Pepper.

"In my opinion," observed Donald, "it would appear you are no far from right."

"Who?" asked Pepper.

"I am no saying the one or the other," hedged Donald.

"Perhaps there is an easier way around," suggested Pepper. "Let's keep on a little longer."

By dint of persistent struggling and pushing they forced their way through the thick growth of saplings until they presently emerged upon a small open space where a man, with a rifle in his hand, was sitting upon the trunk of a fallen tree.

"Hallo!" he gruffly greeted them.

"Good morning," responded Rand. "Rough traveling through here."

"Just so," agreed the man, "and the farther you go, the rougher it gets. What are you doing up this way?"

"We were looking for a motor-cycle," ex-

plained Rand. "Haven't seen anything of one have you?"

"Queer place to look for a motor-cycle," returned the man. "Think they grow on trees?"

"No," replied Pepper, "but we thought maybe there was a place here where they mined them."

"You are pretty smart, aren't you?" retorted the man, eying Pepper suspiciously. "What are you looking for, anyway?"

"Oh, just looking around to see what we can see," answered Dick.

"Well," advised the man, "you can look around the other way and take a back track."

"What do you mean?" asked Rand.

"You can understand English, can't you?" snapped the man. "Just what I said."

"Why should we go back?" demanded Rand.

Without speaking, the man pointed to a rudely painted sign nailed to a tree, which read:

DANGER
KNO TRESPASIN

"What's that?" asked Dick. "What does it mean?"

"You kin read, can't you?" snarled the man.

"A little," admitted Pepper. "I say the fel-

low that painted that was pretty sick, wasn't he?"

"What do you mean by that?" asked the man suspiciously.

"He was having such a bad spell," replied Pepper.

"Not as bad as you will, if you keep on," snapped the man.

"What's the danger if we keep on?" asked Rand.

"Well," replied the man, "there's a company trying a new explosive back there and it's liable to go off kind of unexpected and smash things and you might find it coming your way."

"If that is the case," agreed Rand, "we may as well go back. What do you think, Don?"

"It seems as if you might be right," coincided Donald.

So, as there seemed nothing else to do the boys retraced their steps, going back no wiser than they came.

CHAPTER X

JACK GOES

“WHAT do you think of it?" asked Rand.

The boys had stopped in an open space on their way back and had sat down to eat the lunch they had brought with them. Meanwhile they debated what to do next.

"There doesn't seem anything to do but go back to the farm," observed Dick.

"But what about your cycle?" asked Pepper of Donald.

"Well," replied Donald, looking about him, "it no appears to be here. It may no be impossible to find it and it may no be impossible to find gold in yon sand heap but 'tis no encouraging prospect."

"Oh, I'm talking about the sign up there," explained Rand.

"I don't know," replied Pepper, "but there is something fishy about it."

"I'll no deny there may be something fishy about it, as you say," conceded Donald, "but I'll no deny there may be danger in explosive testing."

"Huh!" sniffed Pepper. "Do you believe that stuff about explosives? I don't."

"Huh! yourself," retorted Donald. "Your imagination has got loose again."

"Imagination nothing," returned Pepper. "I just put two and two together."

"And make twenty-two out of it," asserted Donald.

"And you don't make anything out of it," retaliated Pepper. "Do you believe that any company would put up any such sign as that is?"

"What is the matter with it?" demanded Donald.

"What isn't the matter with it?" responded Pepper. "It is misspelled and poorly painted. There is some kind of crooked work going on there."

"Just because there is a crooked sign you see all kinds of crooked things."

"Well, crooked things usually go together," asserted Pepper.

"I think there is something in what Pepper says," interposed Rand, "but I don't see how we can find out anything about it. We can't go any farther in that direction."

"If we can't go ahead we might go around,"

suggested Dick. "Suppose we make another trial."

"So that if we can't get by the man we may be able to get around in another way. There is something in that," agreed Rand.

"That reminds me—" began Dick.

"Now, don't," warned Don. "You know what these reminders of yours do. Goodness gracious, listen to that! There seems to be something coming now."

"Gee!" exclaimed Pepper. "I should think there was. Just listen to the noise it makes. Sounds as if an elephant was coming."

"It is coming this way, too, whatever it is," said Rand.

"Crickets!" cried Pepper, "it strikes me that we'd better be getting out of the way."

"And the quicker the better," agreed Dick, starting off on a run followed by the others.

"It's a bear!" cried Pepper a few moments later stopping to look back, "and a big fellow, too. There is more trouble a bruin. I don't think this is any good place for me."

"Not after that," said Rand. "I wish I had a gun."

"Or our bows," put in Dick.

"You might try him with a slung shot," suggested Pepper.

"Better not," warned Rand. "Better give him all the room he wants."

"He seems to be after the lunch," observed Donald. The bear could now be observed rooting among the remains of the lunch.

"The uninvited guest," said Pepper. "He's welcome to what is left of mine, so long as he doesn't take a notion to dine on me."

"Pooh," responded Donald, "he's looking for something to eat, he wouldn't bother over bones with nothing on them."

"Have you a blank sheet of paper with you, Rand?" broke in Dick.

"What do you want it for?" asked Pepper.
"Going to write him a note?"

"I thought maybe he would oblige with his sign manual. Make a track on it for us," replied Dick.

"I just believe you're fool enough to try it," observed Donald.

"Oh, no," returned Dick, "I thought you would do it."

"I think we had better be making tracks in another direction," interjected Rand, as the bear

was seen to raise his head and sniff at the air.

"I don't hear him any more," panted Dick, when they had run a considerable distance down the hill and stopped for a breathing spell. "I guess he isn't coming this way."

As they did not hear anything more of the bear they made their way more leisurely down to where they had left Jack.

"Hallo!" called Jack, when they came in hailing distance, "did you find it?"

"No," replied Rand, "but a bear found us."

"A bear!" cried Jack. "Where is it?"

"Oh, he isn't coming this way," replied Pepper. "He thought you would be too tough."

"What is the matter with taking another look around?" asked Jack, when the experiences of the boys had been fully discussed.

"What do you say, Don?" asked Rand.

"In my opinion —" began Donald.

"All right," interrupted Jack, "you stay and think it out. You can have my place. I'd like to have a look for myself," and before Donald could frame a remonstrance he was off, the others following.

"I think," suggested Rand, when they had gone almost to the top of the hill again, "it

would be a good plan if we were each to go off a different way and see what we can find out."

"Why not keep together?" asked Dick.

"Because we will make less noise and can get over a lot more ground if we scatter. Then we can come back to this big pine and report what we have found out and decide if we want to go any farther."

"That's a good idea, Rand," agreed the others.

"Then," directed Rand, when they started, "be sure to come back here in half-an-hour. If anyone gets lost and can't find his way he can sound the call and we will hunt him up."

Setting out in the same general direction the boys each selected his own route and soon lost sight of each other. The undergrowth was heavy and thick and as they saw or heard nothing they began even before the half-hour was up to straggle back one by one.

"Well, what did you find out?" Dick had been the first to get back, and was speaking to Rand who came in a little later.

"Nothing at all," responded Rand, "and you?"

"Same here," said Dick. "Here comes Pep-

per. Hallo, Pepper! What did you discover?"

"Nothing," answered Pepper.

"See anything of the man with the gun?"

"No," laughed Pepper. "I took care not to go that way. Did you see him?"

"No," answered Rand. "I don't believe it was anything but a bluff, though it seems there must be some reason for his talking the way he did. But as we haven't found out anything I think as soon as Jack comes we might as well go back."

"It's 'back to the farm' for us," cried Dick.

"I guess that's right," agreed Pepper, "but where is Jack?"

"Don't know," responded Rand. "Haven't seen him since he went off. Give him a call; it is time he was getting back."

Sounding the call upon their bugles the boys waited for a reply but none came.

"Again," said Rand.

The call was sounded again but with no better result.

"If he doesn't come pretty soon we shall have to hunt him up," put in Dick.

"He doesn't seem to be coming," concluded Pepper, after they had waited for some time.

"Don't you think we had better go in search of him?"

"I think we had," answered Rand. "Which way did he go?"

"Off this way," indicated Dick. "I can point out the spot where we parted."

Lead by Rand the boys endeavored to follow Jack's tracks but the trail was too indistinct and it was growing dark in the woods.

"Perhaps he has gone back and is waiting for us," someone suggested after searching for some time without seeing any signs of their missing comrade.

"He isn't here," announced Pepper disconsolately when they came to the big pine. "We will have to try again."

"Maybe he has been here and gone off to hunt us," suggested Dick.

"I don't think so," returned Rand, "or he would have sounded the call. Why didn't he do that?"

"You will have to ask him," replied Dick. "Perhaps he didn't think of it."

"One of us had better stay here in case he does come," went on Rand. "Let us give him another call."

The call was sounded again and again but with no better result than before.

"He doesn't answer," said Pepper. "We had better resume the search before it gets too dark."

"I will stay here," added Dick, "and keep him if he comes."

"Very well," replied Rand, "Pepper and I will take another look."

Acting upon the suggestion, they once more set about, what proved to be an unavailing search.

"See anything of him?" called Rand, when he and Pepper came back about a half-hour later.

"No," replied Dick, "he hasn't been here."

"I'm afraid he is lost," said Pepper.

"It is awfully queer," decided Rand, after he had sounded the call a half-a-dozen times without bringing any response from Jack. "Perhaps," he added, after a moment's thought, "he came back and not finding anyone here he went on down the hill."

"It is possible," agreed Pepper, "but it doesn't seem likely. I hope he hasn't met with any accident."

"He could sound his bugle if he was anywhere around," returned Rand, "and we would

have found him. Seems as if we had been all over the place."

"I don't see where he could have gone," pondered Pepper, "unless he did go back."

"That is where we will find him," declared Rand.

"I thought you had made up your minds to stay all night," cried Donald when the others came near to where he was waiting with the cycles. "I am commencing to grow roots. And what kept you so long?" he went on. "Did I no tell you before it was just a waste of time?"

"Is Jack there with you?" called Pepper.

"Jack? No," responded Don. "Didn't he go with you?"

"He did," replied Rand, "but we've missed him somewhere."

"Missed him?" exclaimed Donald, "and where is he now?"

"We don't know," answered Rand. "He went off somewhere and didn't come back."

"That's queer," said Donald. "Where do you think he is?"

"Can't think," replied Pepper. "We thought he might have come back here, but as he isn't

here the only thing that I can think of is that he got lost somehow."

"Well, what's to be done now?" asked Dick.

"The only thing I know of," answered Rand, "is to go back and consult Mr. Howell."

"But we can't leave him all alone in the woods," demurred Pepper.

"I don't see what else we can do," decided Rand. "We have hunted all over the place and couldn't find him and we can't do anything more without lights."

"Perhaps Mr. Howell can help us," put in Dick.

"Then the quicker we get back the better," declared Donald.

It was a silent and dejected party that rode back to the farm.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN THE COLONEL CAME

“**H**ELLO, boys! Back once more,” greeted Mr. Howell, when they rode to the farm again in the evening. “Did you find the cycle?”

“No, sir,” replied Rand. “And we have lost Jack.”

“You have done what?” asked Mr. Howell quickly.

“We have lost Jack,” repeated Rand, “and we came back to see if you can help us find him.”

“The first thing to do,” decided Mr. Howell, when they had told the story of the day’s happenings, “is to have supper. It has been waiting for two hours. It won’t do Jack any good for you to go without eating and while you are eating I will hunt up some of the neighbors to make up a searching party and we will find him all right.”

“Where do you think he can be?” anxiously asked Pepper.

“I don’t know, but I think he probably got confused and couldn’t find his way back,” replied Mr. Howell.

"But why didn't he answer our calls?" went on Pepper.

"He may have wandered off in the other direction," returned Mr. Howell, "it is pretty hard to say."

While the boys were eating their supper Mr. Howell drove off with a pair of horses and a wagon making the rounds of the neighborhood and returning almost as soon as they were through. With him were a half-dozen men who were familiar with the neighborhood and ready to take up the search. The boys were anxious to go with them, but Mr. Howell insisted that the men were fresh and could work faster while the boys were in need of rest, and finally prevailed upon them to stay at the farm, promising to return in a little while with their missing comrade.

After the men went off the boys sat around for a while intending to wait for their comrade's return, but as the time passed Mrs. Howell finally persuaded them to lie down as it would be several hours before the searching party could get back even if they found Jack with reasonable promptness. In spite of their anxiety the boys slept soundly and it was daylight when they awoke. Rand was the first to rouse and

as the memory of the previous day's events came to him he looked around to see if Jack was there. Not seeing him, without waking the others, he hurried to the barn floor where he found Mr. Howell lying asleep upon a pile of hay.

Moving quietly to avoid disturbing him Rand looked through the barn in the hope of seeing Jack somewhere about, but in vain.

"Good morning, Mr. Howell," said Rand, as that gentleman rousing with a start got quickly to his feet. "Did you see anything of Jack?"

"Good morning, Rand," replied Mr. Howell. "I am sorry to say we didn't although we hunted all through the woods."

"What is the news?" called Pepper from the mow, hurrying down with the others. "Is Jack there?"

"No," answered Rand, "he hasn't been found yet."

"We are going to take up the search again to-day," went on Mr. Howell. "We have sent out an alarm and will have a lot of men out looking all through the woods."

"I wish Colonel Snow was here," interjected Pepper.

"Who is he?" asked Mr. Howell.

"He was a colonel in the army," explained Rand.

"And he knows all about scouting and following trails," added Pepper.

"Then he is just the man we want to organize the search," declared Mr. Howell. "Do you think he would come?"

"Of course he would if we went after him," replied Pepper.

"Then someone had better go after him at once," decided Mr. Howell. "How long will it take for him to get here?"

"Not less than four or five hours if someone gets off right away," replied Rand.

"I'll start at once," volunteered Donald.

"And I will go with you," said Pepper.

"Get something to eat first," advised Mr. Howell, "and you won't have to stop. We won't make any move until you get back."

"Perhaps Mr. Whilden could help us," suggested Dick. "I will ride over to Riverview and ask him."

"That is a good idea, too," agreed Mr. Howell.

As soon as they had finished their breakfast which Mrs. Howell had ready, Donald and Pep-

per mounting their wheels rode off in one direction and Dick set out in the other.

“Don’t say anything about it to anyone except the Colonel,” cautioned Rand to Donald and Pepper as they went off.

“Do you think no one has any sense but yourself,” was Donald’s parting salutation.

The hours passed but slowly with Rand and Gerald while they waited for the others to come back until, unable to remain inactive any longer, they rode out to meet Donald and Pepper.

The run to Creston by the latter two was made in little more than two hours, but as fortune would have it they did not find the Colonel for a considerable time.

“Well, boys,” he greeted them, when at last he arrived home, “you have got back I see. Have you had a pleasant trip?”

“’Tis no altogether what you would call pleasant,” replied Donald.

“What is it now,” asked the Colonel, “someone meet with an accident?”

“Seemingly so, sir,” replied Pepper.

“What is amiss?” pursued the Colonel.

“It’s Jack,” answered Pepper. “He disappeared yesterday and we haven’t seen him since.”

"Since yesterday," echoed the Colonel.
"How was that?"

"We don't understand it ourselves," replied Donald. "He just went off and didn't come back."

"Come in and tell me about it," said the Colonel, leading the way into his house. "Hem," he mused when Donald and Pepper had finished with their story of their adventures in search of the missing cycle. "You say you searched all over and couldn't find him?"

"Yes, sir, we looked for three or four hours and Mr. Howell was out hunting for him last evening," answered Pepper.

"Then we will have to go over the ground again," decided the Colonel. "You haven't said anything to anyone about it?"

"No, sir," replied Donald, "we just got in and came to you first."

"That's right," commended the Colonel. "Better not say anything until we have something more definite."

"That is what we thought," said Pepper.

"I think it would be better," the Colonel went on, "if you were to go and see your people and tell them of the farm where you are making

your headquarters and that you are going back. In the meantime I will get my horse and ride out on the road; in about an hour you can come after me and we can go on together."

Following the Colonel's directions Don and Pepper went to their homes and told the story of their trip as far as the burning of Mr. Howell's house and an hour later set out after the Colonel. It was some time before they overtook him as the Colonel had kept his horse at a smart trot and it was not long afterwards that they were met by Rand and Gerald.

"And so some of you have been getting into trouble again?" the Colonel greeted them. "You can certainly drop out of sight more expeditiously and more thoroughly than anybody I know of. Jack turned up yet?"

"No, sir," replied Rand. "Not yet."

It was well into the afternoon when they arrived at the farm where Mr. Howell was anxiously waiting for them at the gate.

"Mr. Howell this is Colonel Snow," introduced Rand when they came up.

"I am very glad to see you, Colonel Snow," said Mr. Howell, "and the more so as I hope you will be able to help us out."

"I am sorry not to have met you under pleasanter circumstances, Mr. Howell," replied the Colonel. "And so these boys have been getting into trouble?"

"Pretty serious trouble, I'm afraid," returned Mr. Howell. "Though it is a mystery to me where the boy could have gone. I was going to send an alarm but thought I had better wait until you came."

"Quite right," agreed the Colonel. "I think we'd better take a look over the ground ourselves. It is getting late, how soon can we get off?"

"As soon as you like," replied Mr. Howell. "We have no preparations to make and will be ready when you are."

"That's the spirit," replied the Colonel. "You would make a good soldier."

"I served in the Spanish-American war," replied Mr. Howell with a smile, "and learned to obey orders."

"And to give them, too, I warrant," returned the Colonel with an interrogative pause.

"Captain," said Mr. Howell.

"I think, Captain, that we should get off at once," continued the Colonel.

"Don't you want to rest a little while, Colonel?" asked Rand.

"We can rest all the better when we get through," responded the Colonel.

"Very well, then," said Mr. Howell, "I will have the horses out in the wagon and they will be ready as soon as we have had something to eat."

"Why can't we take our rations with us?" questioned the Colonel.

"Well, you know, Colonel, an army doesn't travel very far on an empty stomach," answered Mr. Howell.

"You have had experience I see, and you are no doubt right," approved the Colonel. "You evidently hold with Napoleon that an army travels on its stomach. We will accept your hospitality."

"Have you any guns, Captain?" asked the Colonel when they had finished dinner and were ready to start.

"I have two breech loaders," said Mr. Howell; "do you think we shall need them?"

"An army without guns is merely a mob," replied the Colonel. "Better bring them along for we don't know what we may run up against."

The Boy Scouts' motto isn't a bad one—Be ready—. The boys told me they saw a bear the other day."

"There are some in the woods I believe," replied Mr. Howell, "and we hear of a panther once in a while in the deeper woods."

CHAPTER XII

WHERE'S DICK?

“**T**HREE are only four of you,” remarked the Colonel when they were about to start. “Where is Dick?”

“He rode over to Riverview to tell Mr. Whilden about Jack,” explained Rand, “and he hasn’t come back yet.”

“How far is that?”

“About ten miles,” replied Mr. Howell.

“That is another one gone,” commented the Colonel. “At this rate there won’t be any of you left in a little while. I think we shall have to put ropes on you to keep you from straying off.”

“How would a bell do?” asked Pepper.

“I’m afraid that wouldn’t be any use,” laughed the Colonel. “You would be out of both sight and hearing before we knew it.”

Following now the road into the woods which the boys had taken on their hunt for Donald’s cycle, Mr. Howell drove as far as he could go with the team. Nearing the woods it had be-

come apparent to all that a storm was brewing. Leaving the wagon here with the man with orders to wait their return, the party under the lead of the Colonel took up the trail of the previous day. It was no easy task to follow this as it had been almost obliterated by the searchers on the preceding night but the Colonel was able to trace it.

"Here is where we started from," explained Rand, when they came to the big pine.

"And this is the place where we saw the man with the gun," added Donald, when they approached the clearing. "See, there is the sign."

"But that isn't the same one," broke in Pepper.

"Why isn't it?" questioned Donald.

"Because that one said: Danger No trespassin, and this one says: Warning Don't go this way."

"Are you sure of that?" asked the Colonel.

"Absolutely," replied Rand, "we all read it."

"That's curious," observed the Colonel. "Looks as though somebody was playing a joke on us. We will go on and see what it means."

"There is another sign over there on that tree," interjected Pepper at this moment.

"And what does that one say?" asked the Colonel.

"Notis," read Pepper, "Truble ahead Go back."

"That's to the point," admitted the Colonel. "There is a grim earnestness about this. There seems to be more to this business than I thought. Better keep back out of the way, boys, there may be real danger ahead."

"There's another one of them over there," notified Dick, pointing to another sign off to the right.

"Well, what can we learn from it?"

"Dick is nearest. What do you make of it?"

"Beware Last warning," read Dick.

"What had we better do, Captain?" asked the Colonel of Mr. Howell. "Keep on or go back?"

"We might try a strategic move," suggested Mr. Howell. "Fall back and advance from another direction."

"Good idea," commended the Colonel. "We will fall back in the center and advance on the flank. We will go back and see if we can pick up the trail from the starting point. Where did you see Jack last?"

"It was somewhere about here," announced Dick when they came to the place. "He went

off that way to the right and I went off to the left."

"Here is his trail," decided the Colonel, after a few minutes' study of the ground, "it isn't very plain but I think we can follow it if the storm holds off."

It was in truth rapidly growing dark. The sky was overcast and a downpour threatened at any moment.

The trail lead up the hill to the right in an almost straight line for several hundred feet.

"There's a path," announced the Colonel, after a time. "He has followed that. Hallo! What's this? There has been some kind of a struggle. He has been attacked here. The man with the limp has been around."

"Monkey Rae's father, of course," said Pepper.

"There's another sign over there," broke in Rand.

"Another sign!" ejaculated the Colonel. "This passes belief. Well, what does that one say?"

"Notis This is the deth line!" read Rand.

"Nothing ambiguous about that," muttered the Colonel. "Must be the work of a lunatic."

There is certainly a species of diabolical ingenuity about them."

As the Colonel spoke there was a sharp snap somewhere in front of them and a small branch was clipped from a tree over the Colonel's head.

"Back, boys, behind the trees," commanded the Colonel, who had grasped his gun and jumped behind the nearest tree. "They are evidently in earnest."

There was another report from somewhere in front and another branch was clipped from the tree but the marksman was not visible.

"He's a good shot," observed the Colonel, "and the storm is upon us. I fancy there is nothing for us to do at present but retire. Fall back, boys, from tree to tree. The Captain and I will cover the retreat."

But with their retreat the firing ceased and without further molestation they made their way back to the wagon in a downpour of rain.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

“**W**HAT do you make of it, Colonel?” asked Mr. Howell that evening after their return, wet and bedraggled, to the farm. “It is more of a mystery to me than ever.”

“I don’t know just what to think of it,” replied the Colonel, after a thoughtful pause. “It is certainly a very mysterious affair. I can’t decide whether it is the work of an irresponsible lunatic or whether there is some sinister motive back of it.”

“I am inclined to the latter opinion,” observed Mr. Howell. “There is something more to it than a mere crazy freak. But it puzzles me what has become of Jack.”

“He has evidently been captured and is being kept in hiding,” replied the Colonel.

“Why should they take him?” asked Rand.

“I can’t answer that,” said the Colonel. “They may be holding him for ransom.”

"But in that case we would probably had a demand from them for money."

"I think that is true," admitted the Colonel. "Then again he may have stumbled on their secret and they decided that the best thing to do was to make him a prisoner."

"What will they do with him?" asked Pepper in alarm.

"That is difficult to say," replied the Colonel. "Hold him for awhile, and then let him go."

"If he is a prisoner," said Rand, "I think that we ought to try and rescue him."

"We must try and rescue him certainly," assented the Colonel. "But you should better leave that to Mr. Howell and me. But we are working in the dark just now."

"That is certainly true," admitted Mr. Howell.

"I see," added the Colonel, "that Rae is in with them."

"Who is he?" asked Mr. Howell.

"He is a convict who escaped from jail," replied the Colonel. "I noticed his track to-day."

"Gee!" exclaimed Pepper, "I hope Jack hasn't fallen into his hands."

"What do you purpose to do next?" went on Mr. Howell.

"I haven't quite decided," replied the Colonel. "We can't do anything more to-night. We can't help him and would only wear ourselves out to no purpose. I think the best thing to do is to try and get a good rest to-night for we shall have a busy day to-morrow."

"But what will happen to Jack?" questioned Pepper.

"I don't think that he is in any immediate danger," replied the Colonel, "and we couldn't do anything to help him if he was, but to-morrow we may be able to find some way. Better get off to sleep, boys."

As it was plain that there was nothing that they could do the boys went to their beds in the mow where they lay for awhile discussing various plans to rescue their comrade.

The following morning broke bright and fair and all were early astir.

"Have you decided upon anything?" asked the boys of the Colonel.

"Yes," he replied.

"Are we going to make another search to-day?" asked Pepper.

"No," returned the Colonel, "we have gone as far in that direction as is wise."

"You are not going to give up, are you?" cried Pepper in dismay.

"Certainly not," answered the Colonel, "but when you can't go any farther in one direction you can sometimes go in another. I have been talking with Captain Howell and we have decided to call upon the Sheriff and beat up the woods thoroughly with a posse."

"When do you purpose doing it?" asked Rand.

"I have sent word to him and he will be here this morning," replied the Colonel. "Has Dick come back yet?"

"No, sir."

"Then I think you ought to ride to Riverview and see if you can find out what he is doing," suggested the Colonel.

"I think it would be a good thing," agreed Rand. "Donald or I will go and we can get back in time to help."

"I think it would be better if you all went," advised the Colonel. "This going off one at a time doesn't seem to work out very well. You want to keep together and not lose sight of one another or we will have two or three hunts going on instead of one."

"Very well," replied the boys, "we will be very careful not to get lost."

"See that you do," commanded the Colonel. "Remember Rand is Leader and you are to obey orders. Take care, Rand. I want you to bring them all back with you."

"Yes, sir," replied Rand, "I will try."

"That won't do, Rand," dissented the Colonel. "You don't want to try, you want to do it."

"I see," answered Rand. "I will do it."

"That's better," commended the Colonel.

"This is too dangerous business for boys," remarked the Colonel when the youths had gone. "I believe we have a desperate lot of criminals to deal with and that is why I sent the boys on this errand; it is better to have them out of the way."

"Have you any idea of what is going on up there in the woods?" asked Mr. Howell.

"No," replied the Colonel. "It is too much of a puzzle for me but I purpose to find out if it be possible."

"It is too deep for me," confessed Mr. Howell.

It was but a short time after the boys had

started for Riverview that an automobile, in which were a half-dozen well armed men, stopped at the gateway to the farm.

"Good morning, Mr. Howell," called one of the men as it came to a stop. "Is Colonel Snow here?"

"Good morning, Sheriff, glad to see you," responded Mr. Howell. "This is Colonel Snow. Colonel Snow this is Sheriff Robinson."

"Good morning, Mr. Sheriff," said Colonel Snow. "I am more than glad to see you and greatly obliged to you for your promptness in responding to my call for help."

"Promptness is a military virtue," returned the Sheriff with a laugh, getting down from the machine. "I have seen service myself. I got your message this morning and came over at once. And now what is the trouble? I knew it was something serious or you wouldn't have sent for me."

"That's a bad piece of business," he went on when the Colonel had told of Jack's disappearance and their hunt for him, and of being fired upon by unseen parties. "And you say that Rae is in it?"

"There is a man with a limp," explained the

Colonel. "I haven't seen him but I saw his tracks."

"That is him, no doubt," decided the Sheriff. "I wish I could get my hands on him. I don't know what he can be doing in these woods but I am sure it is nothing good. He is a thoroughly bad man."

"I think we will agree on that point," assented the Colonel. "The thing now is to catch him."

"Exactly," agreed the Sheriff. "And now what is your plan, for I suppose you have one?"

"I propose, if it meets your approval," replied the Colonel, "that when we get to the woods we divide up into parties of three or four each and make a thorough search of the place around the top of the mountain, approaching the spot which seems to be the center of this business from different sides. If we meet with any resistance we can converge on the point of attack and fight our way through if necessary."

"Good!" exclaimed the Sheriff. "That suits me, and now let's get at it at once. I think we can make room for you in the machine."

"The sooner the better," agreed the Colonel getting into the car with Mr. Howell.

The run to the woods in the car was soon made and, after leaving two of the posse in charge of the car, the force was divided into three squads, under the respective commands of Colonel Snow, Captain Howell and the Sheriff. The first squad under Colonel Snow, it was decided after a short consultation, was to advance directly up the hill, going over the ground they had traversed the previous day. The one under Captain Howell was to go to the right and the third one, under the Sheriff, to the left, for five or six hundred yards; all to converge at the top.

The advance through the woods by the different squads was made without any opposition and in a short time they met at the top.

"Well," said the Sheriff, when they had explored the woods about the top of the mountain, "The birds have evidently flown."

"Looks like a wild goose chase to me," said one of the posse.

"And we are the geese," added another.

"They have taken the alarm," declared the Colonel. "They were here yesterday. Even the signs are gone."

"There are none here now," agreed Mr. How-

ell, "but I know that they were here yesterday."

"And somebody back of them with a gun," confirmed the Colonel. "We might follow that track we were on yesterday when they fired on us and see where it leads to."

Warily following the track, that wound in and out between the trees and rocks, with their guns ready for instant use, the Colonel traced it along the side and bottom of the cliff until it was lost in the mud again.

"This is certainly very strange," mused the Colonel. "There is a path here that has been recently traveled but it stops here at a blank wall."

"That's what we have been running up against all the time," declared Mr. Howell, "a blank wall."

"Perhaps they went up it with a ladder," suggested one of the men.

"That is possible," admitted the Colonel, "but I don't see how we are going to get up."

"There is a sign over there," said another of the men pointing to a sign fastened to a tree which projected over the edge of the cliff.

"Another sign!" ejaculated the Colonel. "This beats me. I'll begin to doubt the evidence

of my own senses pretty soon. What does that say?"

"Good bye," read the Sheriff.

"Well!" exclaimed Mr. Howell, "the mystery is deeper than ever."

"I am going to get at the bottom of this thing if it takes a month," declared the Sheriff. "I will set a watch on these woods and arrest every person going in or out until it is cleared up."

Decidedly crestfallen the party returned to the automobile and went back to the farm where Mr. Howell and Colonel Snow got out and the Sheriff and his posse went on, promising to return the next day to arrange for putting a watch on the woods.

He had scarcely gone when Gerald and Pepper, riding at full speed and shouting at the top of their voices came dashing along the road from the opposite direction.

"Great Scott!" cried Mr. Howell. "What can have happened now?"

CHAPTER XIV

LOOKING FOR DICK

“**W**HERE is Dick?” asked Rand, looking in dismay at his comrades, none of whom had any answer to make to his question.

The four boys, Rand, Phil, Donald and Gerald, had ridden to Riverview where they arrived early in the morning. They found none of the family at home: Mr. and Mrs. Whilden being away on a yachting trip with their daughters, and Frank was out with his automobile. He had gone to Springville, so Mr. Reed, the superintendent of the place, said. He would not be away long, Mr. Reed thought, if they wanted to wait for him, and might return any moment. So far as he knew Dick had not been there.

“Where can he be?” continued Rand. “It is a straight road, only a few miles. He couldn’t have got lost in that little distance and if anything had happened to him we should have heard of it.”

“He doesn’t seem to be here,” remarked Donald.

"Not so far as you'd notice him," assented Gerald.

"What shall we do?" asked Rand after they had discussed Dick's disappearance from all points without arriving at any solution of the mystery.

"There doesn't seem anything to do but go back and tell the Colonel that Dick is lost, too," remarked Pepper.

"I don't like that idea," demurred Rand.

"Let's wait awhile and see if Frank comes back," suggested Gerald.

"Why not ride out on the road and meet him?" amended Pepper, "and maybe he can help us find Dick."

"That's better," agreed Gerald. "'Tis no good sitting here like bumps on a log when we might be doing something."

"What do you think, Don?" asked Rand.

"There doesn't seem to be any objection to it," returned Donald.

"Of course there isn't," insisted Pepper. "If we don't meet him we can come back."

"Which road do we take?" asked Rand of the superintendent.

"Ride up the road for about a mile," replied

the superintendent, "until you come to a cross road, then take the road to the right."

"How shall we know the right road when we come to it?" asked Donald.

"There is a milestone on the corner that says, '19 M to S.' that's Springville. I reckon you can't miss it."

"Wait a moment," broke in Pepper, as they were starting off. "Oh, Mr. Reed, can you lend me one of those rifles we had the other day?"

"What do you want with that?" asked Gerald. "Do you think there are any mad dogs on the road?"

"Don't know," answered Pepper. "There may be a wild cat or something. You know we saw a bear the other day."

"But we won't meet any in the road," objected Rand.

"You never can tell," returned Pepper. "We are liable to meet almost anything around here."

"That's right," agreed Mr. Reed, "but you cannot carry a rifle very well on a cycle. I have a revolver that I can let you have. It will be nearly as effective and much easier to carry."

"That's the thing," assented Pepper. "I

hope that we won't meet anything but if we do we will have something to defend ourselves with."

"Do you know how to use it?" asked Mr. Reed.

"Of course I do," affirmed Pepper, buckling the belt with the revolver around his waist. "I have shot them lots of times."

"I think," observed Donald, when they started, "it would no be a bad plan if Pepper rode in front."

"Artillery to the front," said Rand.

"All right," returned Pepper, "anything to be agreeable."

Following the directions given by Mr. Reed they had no difficulty in finding the road to Springville along which they rode at a leisurely pace, until they came to a fork in the road, without having seen anything of Frank.

"Which way now?" called Pepper. "Mr. Reed didn't say anything about this."

"I don't believe there is any use going any farther," said Rand. "He may have gone back some other road."

"Let's wait here for a while," suggested Gerald, "perhaps he may come along yet."

"Here comes someone now!" cried Pepper. "Maybe that is him. No, he's on a motor-cycle. Gee! but he is coming. Look at the dust he's making."

"Looks as if he was riding a Marathon," put in Gerald.

"They don't ride Marathons," corrected Donald; "they run them."

"Oh, they have improved on them like they have on everything else," returned Gerald, "but say, he is going some."

"I wonder if he's the fellow that stole your cycle, Don?" said Pepper. "Looks as if he was running away from something. Let's stop him and have a look at it."

"'Tis no likely he'll stop," demurred Donald.

"Then we will ride after him until he does," declared Pepper. "Be all ready to take up the chase if he don't stop."

"Hallo, there!" he shouted when the rider came near. "Hold on a minute, will you?"

"Hallo, yourself!" returned the rider bringing his cycle to a stop and jumping to the ground.

CHAPTER XV

WHERE JACK WENT

WHEN Jack parted from Dick on the afternoon of his disappearance he went off to the right, as his track had shown, this to avoid the heavy growth of underbrush in front of him and at the same time to get around the man who had ordered them back. Hoping in this way to find out what it was, if anything, that the man was trying to conceal. He had almost reached the summit of the hill when he saw what looked like an indistinct path that wound downward between the scattered masses of rock.

"This must lead to something," he thought, setting out to follow it. "I will see where it goes." He was not yet enough of a scout to know that in following such a trail it would have been wiser to have kept to one side just keeping the trail in sight and not following it directly.

The path, although indistinct, was clear enough for him to follow and led along the side of the cliff which rose almost perpendicu-

larly. As he went along with his eyes bent on the ground he came to a place by a thick clump of bushes where the path seemed to become less distinct. Stopping to investigate the reason of this he was suddenly grasped about the body and his arms pinned to his sides while a rough hand was placed over his mouth preventing any outcry. He struggled fiercely to free himself but he was held too firmly and was obliged to submit.

“It’s no use trying to get away and you may as well give up,” said the man who had seized him.

It was the same man who had warned the boys to go back earlier in the day.

“Will you be quiet if I let go of you?” he asked when Jack had ceased to resist.

As he was unable to speak Jack could only nod his head in assent.

“If he don’t,” broke in another man who was standing back of him and whom Jack recognized by his voice as Rae, “just knock him in the head.”

“Oh, it won’t be necessary to do that,” replied the other pleasantly. “He is a sensible boy and will find it a good deal more comfortable to do as

he is told without making any unnecessary fuss."

"What do you want me to do?" asked Jack.

"Get along there!" cried Rae, roughly giving him a shove.

"That will do, Rae," interfered the other.
"We don't want any of that."

"What is it to you, West?" demanded Rae.
"He isn't your kid, is he?"

"No," returned West, "but I don't mean to see him abused without any cause."

"You have plenty to do in minding your own business," snapped Rae, but he nevertheless refrained from any further abuse of Jack.

"All you have to do," said West, "is to go along quietly and there won't be any trouble."

"What are you going to do with me?" asked Jack.

"Take you along with us," answered West.

"What for?" questioned Jack.

"Too much curiosity," replied West. "You know you were warned to go back but you wouldn't do it."

"I will go back and not come here any more if you will return the cycle," proposed Jack.

"Cycle nothing," answered West. "Anyway you know too much to be at large."

"But I don't know anything," asserted Jack.

"Oh, get on," broke in Rae, "we don't want to fool here all night."

"He ought to be blindfolded before we hit the trail," suggested the man who had effected the boy's capture.

Taking a handkerchief from his pocket West bound it tightly over Jack's eyes then taking his hand led him on.

"Now we are ready, swing ahead," ordered Rae; "it's getting late."

"Hold fast to me and mind your steps," directed West after they had traveled some distance. "This is a dangerous part of the way, be careful or you may have a nasty fall."

"And a good thing if he did, too," interjected Rae.

"Come on!" directed West and as well as Jack could judge they passed through a narrow opening and along a rough ledge where he stumbled and would have fallen more than once if he had not been held up by West. For several minutes they went on in this way until the path became less uneven and they came to a stop.

"Who have you got there?" he heard someone say.

"A sneak we picked up outside," replied Rae, giving him a push forward.

"Why didn't you spank him and send him back?" went on the other.

"Tried to," returned Rae, "but he wouldn't go. He's one of them Boy Scouts down at Creston. Always poking his nose into other people's business."

"What did you want to bring him down here for?"

"What else was we to do with him?" asked Rae sullenly.

"Anything," said the other. "Take him down in the gorge and lose him."

"We can do that later," returned Rae, "what shall we do with him now?"

"Oh, turn him loose as long as you have got him here," directed the other. "He can't get away."

The bandage was taken from Jack's eyes and he found that he was on a small plateau that hung like a shelf on the face of the cliff. On the back and sides the walls rose to an overhanging ledge which served as a roof. On the front at one end there extended a spur of rock some twenty feet in length which rose to a

height of fifteen feet, making at this end a small cavern. The remainder of the plateau being open to the opposite side of the gorge which was steep and heavily wooded, the plateau was open to observation from the other side of the gorge only, the ledge above concealing it from the top of the cliff and it being invisible from below. There was a precipitous path at one end which appeared to lead to the depths of the gorge.

There appeared to be, as he noticed at first glance, a half-a-dozen men and a boy, whom he recognized as Monkey Rae, on the plateau. Some of them were sitting upon the stones that were scattered about the place while others were busy at some kind of work. Lying about were blankets and piles of bedding. There were also utensils of various kinds and in one corner a stack of rifles. At the end of the plateau, behind the ledge of stone was an apparatus of some kind but what it was he could not make out.

Through a small ravine which opened upon the plateau at the back, there flowed a small stream of water which ran across the plateau and fell into the valley below. Upon three crossed sticks above a fire hung a kettle in which something was cooking.

After the bandage had been taken from his eyes no further attention was paid to Jack and he was apparently free to do as he pleased. Taking a seat upon a blanket which laid upon a flat stone he watched the men about him. Four of them, among whom was Rae, were now playing cards. Another, a tall, stoutly built man, who was evidently the leader of the band from the way in which the others deferred to him, was walking up and down along the edge of the plateau, stopping now and then to listen as if he was waiting for some signal. West, who was apparently the cook, was watching the pot over the fire, stirring up the contents occasionally and replenishing the fire.

"What brought you here?" suddenly demanded the Leader, stopping in front of Jack.

"These men," replied Jack.

"I mean what were you doing on the hill?"

"Looking for a motor-cycle that was stolen from us," answered Jack. "We were at Mr. Ford's farm and last night one of our wheels disappeared."

"Looking for a mortor-cycle, eh?" said the man. "What made you think it was here?"

"Why, we traced it as far as the woods," re-

plied Jack, "and thought maybe it was hidden here somewhere."

"You fool!" cried the man to Monkey Rae who had made some inarticulate exclamation. "What did I tell you?"

"Leave the boy alone, Mac," interposed Rae. "He has as good a right as any of us to get what he wants."

Mac scowled but made no answer and resumed his pacing up and down.

"I don't see what has become of Stumpy and Mott," he muttered after a while. "They ought to have been back last night."

"Guess they got the money and went off with it," hazarded one of the men.

"If they have," ejaculated Mac with an oath, "I'll follow them around the world and kill them both!"

"I wouldn't start until after supper," put in one of the men who was one of the players, throwing down his cards as he spoke. "How's that grub coming on, West?"

"All ready," answered West.

The men threw aside their cards at this announcement and taking up tin plates from a heap near the fire helped themselves to the contents of

the kettle and to some chunks of bread that had been baked upon some flat stones in front of the fire, each going off to sit upon convenient stones while they ate.

“What shall we do with the boy?” asked West.

“Oh, give him something to eat,” responded the Leader carelessly. “You don’t need to bother about him, he can’t get away.”

“Here, boy,” said West, heaping up a plate with some of the contents of the kettle, a savory rabbit stew, it proved to be, which he handed to Jack to put away, and which Jack was hungry enough to do without any hesitation. Besides the stew and the bread there was a large pot of coffee of which the men freely drank.

By the time they were through with their supper it was quite dark and the men made themselves comfortable lying on the blankets or sitting against the sides of the cavern, smoking and drinking from a can which they passed from one to another.

“Hey, Red!” said the Leader at length, breaking the silence which had settled upon the camp. “You and Reed better get out and see if you can find out what has become of Stumpy and

Mott. Play low and see what you can pick up."

The two men named made no reply, but each taking a revolver went off through the ravine followed by another of the men, the others silently continuing their smoking.

Jack sat on his blanket waiting until the others should drop off to sleep when he purposed making an attempt to escape, but he was himself the first to drop off.

CHAPTER XVI

JACK GETS INTO TROUBLE

WHEN Jack awoke it was growing light but the men were lying about the plateau apparently still asleep. The two who had gone off the night before had, it seemed, not yet returned. Angry with himself at having fallen asleep Jack arose softly, looking around to see if he was observed, and finding that no one paid any attention to his movements, he cautiously made his way to the opening of the ravine. Here he paused to see if there was any movement among the men but discerning none he entered the opening and began an upward climb. It was pitch dark in the ravine but by feeling along the wall he groped his way, scarcely daring to breathe, until he had gone, as near as he could judge, several hundred feet, when he ran against a wall of rock where the passage came to an abrupt end.

Thinking that perhaps he had made a mistake and taken a wrong turn he cautiously lit a match to look around him. Above he could see a faint

glimmer of daylight, but all about him was a solid wall of rock too steep to attempt to climb.

"I must have come the wrong way," thought Jack. "I will have to go back and try again."

Turning around to retrace his steps he was startled by a mocking laugh.

"Thought you were going to get out, didn't you?" cried Monkey Rae who had followed him unseen. "Nosey Jack had to come back," he sang.

Jack made a dash at his tormentor who ran down through the passage singing his refrain.

The fire, before which a number of squirrels were roasting and a batch of bread was baking, was burning briskly when Jack got back to the plateau and the men were sitting about waiting for their breakfast but nobody paid any attention to the boys except the Leader who shouted to Monkey to shut up his noise.

After breakfast one of the men went off through the ravine which Jack resolved to try again at the first opportunity.

The time passed slowly, Jack having nothing to do but watch the others, but every now and then Monkey would take occasion to pass near him to give him a sly kick or a blow as he went

by while singing in a low tone: "Jack, Jack, had to come back," then dashing off before Jack had a chance to retaliate.

In a little while the man who had gone out returned to report that there was no one about.

"Light up the fire!" commanded the Leader.

In obedience to his order a fire was lit under the apparatus in the cavern which Jack now saw was a still.

The man who had made the report now went off again, West and Rae attending to the still and the Leader going out and returning at frequent intervals.

The other men came and went about their work. Jack sat on a rock in the background looking at them and planned means of escape, while Monkey moved about making faces at him, or giving him a blow or a kick as opportunity served and then dodging away before Jack could retaliate, until Jack, thoroughly angered, turned suddenly upon Monkey and gave him a blow in the chest that sent him staggering back. Nothing loth Monkey came back with a blow in the face that filled the air with stars for Jack and in a moment they were giving blow for blow in good earnest.

As the fight waxed hot the men dropped their work to watch them but not interfering, although Rae was ready to back up Monkey.

"That's the way!" he cried. "Give him another like that! You will have him going in a minute, Jimmie!"

The fight was fairly even for the two boys were well matched but Jack although angry was cooler than Monkey and his blows did not go as wild as did his opponent's who was getting the most punishment. It was plain that Jack was getting the better of Monkey when the latter's father aimed a vicious blow at Jack that would have floored him if it had landed.

"Hey, none of that!" interposed West, intercepting the blow. "Let them fight it out fair."

"What have you got to do with it!" shouted Rae, aiming a blow at West who quickly retaliated in kind and in a moment the two were engaged in a rough and tumble fight, upon which, Monkey and Jack, forgetting their own battle, scrambled quickly out of the way.

The two men thoroughly angry fought savagely for a few minutes until Rae breaking away from his antagonist ran to where the revolvers

were lying and seizing one aimed it at West and was on the point of firing when the Leader rushed out from the ravine.

“Out with the fire, quick!” he commanded. “There is a whole gang outside beating up the woods. If they see the smoke they will get on our trail and it will be all up with us. What devil’s work is this?” striking up Rae’s arm. “Have you gone crazy?”

“Take that!” shouted Rae beside himself with rage, striking at the Leader’s head with the butt of the pistol, while another came at him from the other side.

“We have had enough of your orders!” cried Rae savagely.

“Oh, you have, have you!” returned the Leader. Striking out with his right hand he caught Rae upon the point of the chin, lifting him from his feet and sending him down like a log while with his left he caught the arm of the other man, twisting it until he howled with the pain and sank to his knees.

“Do you want any more?” demanded Mac, but neither made any response. “Tie them up and throw them in the corner out of the way,” he directed West, “while I put out the fire.

This place is getting altogether too hot for us and we will have to get out and in a hurry, too."

"Keep your eye on that whelp there!" indicating Monkey, he went on, "and if he tries to loosen them thrash him good and plenty with a rope's end. This is what comes of letting kids in."

The two rebels were too cowed to resist and were unresistingly bound by West and dragged to one side. In the meantime the Leader had put out the fire under the still and began taking it apart, hiding the different parts in crevices in the side of the cliff in which he was assisted by West.

Standing near the edge of the cliff Jack was looking down into the gorge and wondering if he could make his escape that way when Monkey passing behind him apparently stumbled and falling against him sent him rolling toward the edge. Catching at Monkey as he fell Jack dragged him down, the two fighting and struggling on the edge of the plateau, at the imminent risk of going over, until West dragged them back, pulled them apart and cuffing Monkey sent him off to stay beside his father, where he sat glowering and vowed vengeance.

Panting from his struggle Jack threw himself upon his blanket to rest, when there came a dull sound like the beat of a bass-drum which reverberated through the place but did not seem to issue from any particular spot.

This was followed after a short interval by two more beats and this again by one more.

At the first sound Mac and West had stopped to listen, then as the others followed, West went up through the ravine returning a few minutes later with the two men who had gone off the night before.

“Getting ready to move I see,” said Red, looking about him and then at the two men who were tied up. “What has been going on?”

“Just a little diversion on the part of Rae and Dublin,” returned Mac. “They thought they could run this business better than I could, that is all. . What did you find out about Stumpy and Mott?”

“Jugged,” returned Red laconically.

“Jugged?” ejaculated Mac.

“Yes,” replied Red. “They tried to hold up the car but there was a whole gang of Cops on board and they took them in.”

“Dash the luck!” cried the Leader. “Are

they still hunting for the boy we captured?"

"Not now," returned Red with a grin. "There were some of 'em snooping around but we fired a couple of shots at them and they vammosed."

"That isn't any good," declared Mac. "They will only come back stronger than ever. We have got to get away from here until it blows over. It all comes from that boy's foolishness. What does he want of a cycle? I don't see what they wanted with him here anyhow. We have got to get out of here and quick too. Get to work and hustle this stuff out of the way!"

CHAPTER XVII

A FRIEND INDEED

LITTLE more was said but all worked diligently in making up part of the stuff lying about the place into bundles for carrying, and hiding the rest in crevices of the rocks. The two mutineers, Rae and Dublin, after a consultation by the others, had been released upon the promise on their part to behave themselves, and were busy with the others.

When this had been done the men gathered up the stuff they had packed in bundles and each one, with all that he could carry, followed the Leader down the path which led into the gorge, even Jack being obliged to do his share. The way was along a narrow ledge over which progress was slow, as frequent stops had to be made to cross gaps in the way and where the bundles had to be passed from one to another. The descent was finally made to the bottom of the gorge which was filled with rock and stones of all kinds of sizes and shapes through which a path could be made only with great difficulty. Across

the gorge which was several hundred feet in width began the ascent of the other side, which was even more difficult and toilsome than any previous part of the journey, and it was several hours from the time of leaving the plateau before they succeeded in gaining the top of the opposite cliff. By this time the entire party were exhausted by the climb and in an ugly humor so that frequent quarrels resulted. Both Jack and Monkey Rae came in for hard words and an occasional blow.

It was almost dark by the time that they reached a small open space in the thick woods some miles from the gorge where the Leader gave orders to camp for the night, at the same time directing that Jack should be tied up so that there should be no chance of his escaping. This was done none too gently by Red, who regarded Jack with marked disfavor, as perhaps with the exception of West, all considering him as the cause of their trouble. A storm had come on and conditions were uncomfortable enough.

“What are you going to do with that cub?” demanded Rae, whom the presence of the other men had given fresh confidence, of the Leader.

“What do you want to do with him?”

"Anything to get rid of him," returned one of the men.

"Why not take him off in the country and let him find his way back if he can," suggested West.

"And bring the whole pack down on us," objected Dublin. "We want to shut him up for good."

"That's the talk," chimed in Red. "About six feet of fresh earth will do for him."

"If you let him go," argued West, "his friends will give up the hunt, but if you don't they will make this place too hot to hold us."

"Bah!" interjected Red. "They can't find him under the ground and they have got to quit sometime. They won't have nothing on us anyway."

"That's enough," growled the Leader. "Tie him up and we will take a vote on it in the morning."

In obedience to Mac's orders Jack was more securely bound. He was given a blanket to lie upon but no further attention was paid to him while the men discussed their plans for the future.

"What is the next move?" asked Red.

"We'll lay quiet here for three or four days," replied the Leader, "and after the hunt has died down we will go back to the old place."

"Any of us to go over there to-morrow?" questioned Dublin.

"Better not," decided Mac. "We will keep under cover here for a few days until we see how things turn out."

After the Leader had sent out a man to see that all was secure the camp settled down into quiet and in a short time all, with the exception of Jack, were apparently asleep. For a long time he lay awake dreading the fate that the next day might have in store for him, and besides, the ropes with which he was bound were drawn so tightly about him that the pain was almost unbearable. But in spite of it all he had finally dropped off into a troubled sleep when he was aroused by a light touch on his arm. It was so dark in the shadow of the woods that he could not see anything and thinking that it was some wild animal he was about to cry out in alarm.

"Sh!" whispered a voice in his ear. "Keep still and do as I tell you. I am going to loosen the ropes."

Lying down beside him the man, whom Jack

recognized as West, worked silently but quickly and in a few moments the ropes were cut and Jack released. As the pressure of the ropes relaxed and the blood began to circulate through the benumbed parts the pain was so great that it was only by gritting his teeth and clenching his hands until the worst of the pain was over that Jack could refrain from crying out.

"Can you move?" whispered West after a little time.

"Yes," replied Jack in a whisper.

"Then get up and give me your hand," directed West. "We'd better go off this way. Red has just gone to the other side."

It was difficult for Jack to get upon his feet but with the aid of West he finally accomplished it although he could hardly stand. Taking his hand West led him a few steps at a time, pausing to listen if anyone in the camp was stirring but hearing nothing more than an occasional snore from one of the sleepers.

Dropping to the ground Jack crept a few paces for what seemed to him an interminable time worming his way out of the camp, going on in this way, with frequent stops, until they were some distance into the woods where they could

move more freely. Here they got upon their feet again and set out more rapidly.

"Now be off with you," whispered West.
"Get away as fast as you can."

"Where are you going?" asked Jack after a time in a whisper.

"Going back to the camp," answered West.
"You will keep on through the woods until you come to a road and then make for the nearest town."

"What will they do if they catch me?" was Jack's next question.

"Give you short shrift, I reckon," replied West. "But I don't mean that they shall if I can help it. Can you walk now?"

"Yes," replied Jack, "I am all right now."

While West went back to the camp Jack pushed on until he was deep in the woods, when an outcry from the camp announced that his escape had been discovered.

"Goodness," cried Jack. "They will be after me now."

In a moment the camp was in a bustle and confusion.

"After him!" shouted the Leader. "Scatter out and get him. Don't let him get away!"

“They are coming this way,” whispered Jack to himself as the noise made by the pursuers crashing through the underbrush came nearer. “I wonder if they are following me?”

“It isn’t likely,” he reflected. “They can’t tell which way I went, so I’ll keep on as quietly as I can.”

For several rods Jack kept on, but one of the pursuers was not far behind and kept coming nearer all the time.

“If I lie down and keep still,” thought Jack, “perhaps he may pass me in the darkness.”

Crouching down in a small thicket he waited, scarcely breathing while his pursuer floundered on by the place where he was hidden, so close that he could have touched him as he passed. Jack began to breathe again when the man suddenly stopped.

“He hasn’t gone this way,” he heard him say. Then turning he retraced his steps and the next moment tumbled over Jack, falling on top of him.

CHAPTER XVIII

A LONG CHASE

“**H**I!” he shouted, grabbing Jack and endeavoring to hold him down, but the words died away into a gurgle as Jack in his desperation, clutched him by the throat throttling him.

“Be quiet,” whispered Jack.

Struggling furiously, kicking and striking, the man strove to call out but Jack’s grip was too strong to be broken and he held him fast until the man lay still.

“Gracious,” thought Jack, “I hope I haven’t choked him but it was the only thing to do. Now keep still and keep quiet,” he threatened, “or I will make use of this revolver,” at the same time giving him a tap with the butt.

While Jack had been struggling with the man the others, who had heard his muffled outcry, were looking and calling for him.

“Hey, where are you?” shouted Mac.

The man made no effort to respond, a look at the revolver had silenced him.

For a short time the others kept up the search

but as they heard nothing more they finally went off in another direction.

"Queer," said Mac as they departed, "I was sure I heard a cry."

"Must have been the other way," replied Rae.

When the noise made by the men forcing their way through the bushes had completely died away, Jack released his captive with a warning to keep quiet. The revolver had a very persuading influence.

"I had better be getting along for it will be getting daylight in a little while," thought Jack.

"Now, my man, you keep quiet till I am out of sight for I warn you I am a good shot."

A quarter of an hour later he emerged upon a road where his progress was more rapid.

"Thank heaven!" cried Jack fervently, when he had gone some distance along the highway, "I am out of their hands now!"

Hardly had he given expression to his gratitude when he heard beyond a turn in the road, the sound of voices. He made a quick scramble into the thick underbrush at the side of the road and none too soon. He could not see the men as they passed but recognized the voice of Monkey Rae.

"Straight ahead and quickly for me!" decided Jack when he again felt safe to proceed.

For a moment he stopped to listen and catch his breath but hearing nothing ventured on.

"The only thing to do is to keep on," concluded Jack, "until I come to some place where I will be safe."

For awhile the road led through the woods and he moved but slowly, anxiously alert for any sounds that might indicate the presence of his pursuers but hearing nothing of them. He now came to more open ground with fields and clear stretches of land. The light was just showing in the East when he came to a farm, the house standing well back from the road with a large barn in the rear.

"If I could only get into that barn," thought Jack, "and rest awhile I would be all right again. I feel as if I could sleep for a week, but I don't suppose it is any use to try. They probably have a half-a-dozen dogs there and they would rouse the whole neighborhood. But perhaps I can find some other place."

Cautiously working his way through the fields away from the house he succeeded in getting near to the barn where he found a large hay

shed which was nearly filled with hay. Climbing to the top of this he burrowed into it and in a few moments was fast asleep.

Some hours later he was awakened by the sound of voices close beside him.

“Haven’t seen anything of a boy around here, have you?” he heard someone ask.

“No,” replied another. “Haven’t seen anything of him. Be you looking for a boy?”

“Yes,” went on the first speaker whom he now recognized as Mac. “We are very anxious to find him.”

“A boy, did you say?” asked the other whom Jack took to be a farm hand. “What is he been a doin’?”

“Knocked a man down on the road and robbed him,” answered Mac.

“Jehoshaphat!” exclaimed the farmer. “Ye don’t say!”

“Yes,” went on Mac. “Caught him and locked him up but he got out somehow and come up this way.”

“Phew!” ejaculated the farmer. “That’s all fired too bad. And you say he come this way?”

“Pretty sure he did,” returned Mac. “We

tracked him part of the way. You want to keep a sharp lookout or he will be robbing you next."

"My! My!" exclaimed the farmer. "Declare 'taint safe to be in your own home no more."

"Well," said Mac, "as he don't seem to be here we may as well go on. So long."

"Hope you catch him," added the farmer.

"Hope we do," replied Mac fervently.

The men, greatly to the relief of Jack, started toward the road when the farmer's dog which had been running about sniffing at the ground was barking the while, seemingly at the pile of hay.

"What is the matter, Spot?" called the farmer. "Something in the hay? Guess there must be a rabbit in there."

"Reckon there is more than a rabbit in there!" cried Mac, who came running back and climbed up on the pile of hay. "What do you say to that?" pulling the hay off of Jack and dragging him out to the farmer's astonished gaze. "There he is now."

Roughly shaking Jack he handed him down to West who was standing below. "Don't let him get away from you," he commanded.

"Trust me for that," returned West, seizing Jack by the collar. Evidently he had not been suspected of aiding in Jack's escape and was ostensibly at least vigorously aiding in the recapture. Jack made no sign which would betray his former friendliness.

"Be he the one you were hunting?" asked the farmer.

"Sure thing," replied Mac. "Thought you had got away, didn't you?" he went on, addressing Jack. "Came pretty near it, too, but you won't get another chance," he added significantly.

"But I am not an escaped prisoner," protested Jack. "These men have no right to touch me."

"Of course not," said Mac. "You didn't run away last night."

"No, I didn't. These men are not officers," persisted Jack to the farmer. "They are moonshiners or worse. They made me a prisoner because I accidentally discovered the secret of their hiding place."

"That's a likely story," declared the farmer. "What were you doing hiding in that haystack, I'd like to know?"

"That's it," said Mac. "His stories don't

hang together. Come, now," seizing Jack by the arm and dragging him along.

"But it's the truth," protested Jack.

"Shut up," commanded Mac roughly. "It's lucky for you," he went on to the farmer, "that he didn't meet you at night."

"I reckon it is," replied the farmer. "He's a desperate looking fellow, ain't he?"

As it was useless to resist any further and not a little disheartened at being retaken when he thought he had made his escape, Jack went with his captors across the fields toward the woods.

CHAPTER XIX

WHERE DICK WENT

DICK had ridden without incident several miles on the road to Riverview on the morning after Jack's disappearance. When, however, he came to a bridge over a small stream which crossed the road he was somewhat disconcerted to see a bull standing in the very middle of the approach to the entrance of the bridge.

"Hallo!" thought Dick, "that fellow evidently thinks he owns the road. I wonder how I am going to get by him?"

Riding up slowly as close as he dared he considered the advisability of attempting to pass by but as the bull at the sight of Dick put down his head and began pawing the ground as if daring him to come on Dick concluded he had another thought coming.

"I don't think an attempt to race by would work out the way I'd like," decided Dick. "He is altogether too ready, but maybe I can drive him away."

Riding back a short distance Dick placed his

cycle by the side of the road. Then picking up some smooth, round stones he returned to within a short distance of the bull which was still standing in the middle of the road. Taking one of the stones he had picked up, Dick fitted it to his sling and let it fly at the bull, the stone striking it full in the forehead. The bull apparently astonished at the blow which he did not understand shook his head angrily but instead of retreating gave vent to a bellow of defiance and started up the road. As he came toward him Dick slung another stone which struck the bull again between the horns. Shaking his head the bull which now seemed to regard the youth as the aggressor charged down upon him. Dick, stopping for no further argument, ran with all his speed back along the way he had come but he was no match for the enraged animal which gained rapidly upon him until it was so close that he could almost feel its horns when he tripped over a stone and tumbled headlong into a dried up water course which ran beside the road. The bull went on but apparently astonished by the sudden disappearance of its enemy stopped and gazed up and down the road, giving vent now and again to an angry bellow, but

seeing nothing to attack, returned slowly to the place where he had been when Dick first saw him.

Waiting until he had gone some distance away, Dick crept on along the ditch until he concluded that he was a safe distance from the bull when he climbed out and ran to his cycle.

“There is no use my trying to go that way,” soliloquized Dick. “He must think he’s Horatius at the bridge. He seems determined to keep it at all hazards.”

Before he could seat himself in the saddle there was a roar behind him and glancing back he saw the bull coming at full speed. Throwing on the full power of the machine he got under good headway just as the bull was upon him. Fortunately for Dick the roadway was smooth and a little down grade so that he was enabled to get a good start. For a hundred feet they raced so close that Dick could hardly determine if he was gaining or not but the pace told and he gradually drew away from the bull which finally gave up the chase.

“Whew!” ejaculated Dick, who did not slacken his speed until the bull was lost in the distance. “I don’t think I will try that road

again. I guess the longest way round is the safest way on for me this time."

Riding back he continued until he came to a road which crossed at nearly right angles the one he was upon.

"I will choose the road to the right," he decided, "and if I keep on to the right I must come out all right."

Taking the road to the right Dick followed it through its various turns and twistings until he could not tell if he were traveling North or South, East or West. The road now led through a forest and so uneven and full of ruts was the roadbed, Dick was compelled to walk and push his heavy machine, no easy task.

"It's a long lane that hasn't any turns they say," he mused, "this one has got lots of turns but that doesn't seem to make it any shorter. There's a fork ahead anyhow, and I'll keep off to the right."

But this wasn't any improvement on the road he had been traveling and after an hour's toil he was still in the woods. Looking at his watch he saw it was almost three o'clock. At a small brook he had a wash and ate his lunch, resting for a little while before setting out again.

"I suppose I might as well keep on," he reflected, "there isn't any use going back. This road must come out somewhere, even if it doesn't seem to have any end. If it hasn't it's the only road of its kind, I guess."

But after a still longer period of toil Dick began to have doubts upon that point as he was apparently no nearer an end than when he started.

"Must go round in a circle," finally concluded Dick. "I shall probably get wound up after awhile. I guess I had better go hunting for my dinner before it gets too dark or else I won't get any. It's passing strange that I don't meet anyone or find a house."

He was pretty well fagged out by this time so he sat down to rest and determine upon his course of procedure.

"Shall I go on or go back?" he pondered. "It's an all day's trip to go back and it may be just as far the other way to the end if there is any. I guess it's a toss up which way I go. I think I'll do as Don does and toss," taking out a coin from his pocket. "Which shall it be? Head for go ahead, that's the proper thing, and tail to turn tail and go back."

Flipping the coin in the air he caught it again in his hand.

"Head," he exclaimed, "that means go on."

Wheeling his cycle into the road he trudged ahead and quickly thereafter came to another and more traveled road.

"Thank goodness!" he cried, mounting his cycle and taking the road to the right, "I'll get somewhere now."

The road now lead out of the woods and before long he came to open spaces interspersed with fields and a little later to a cluster of farm buildings.

"Guess that must be a farmer's home," remarked Dick as he came near to it, "but it's been so long since I've seen one that I am not quite sure. Guess I'll ride up and take a look at it."

Wheeling in at the drive he rode up to the house and was about to dismount and knock at the door to inquire his whereabouts when there was such an explosion from his engine that he tumbled over backward and the inmates of the home came rushing out in alarm.

"What is the matter?" asked the lady of the house.

"Nothing but the valve blew out," answered Dick. "No serious harm."

"Gee!" cried a small boy who appeared from somewhere. "I didn't know whether it was Pop coming home or an airship throwing bombs."

"Does your father announce his arrival like that?" asked Dick.

"Well, not always," responded the boy. "Sometimes he blows up before he gets home. Say, do you think you can fix it?"

"Guess I could," replied Dick, "if I had the tools.

"Come along, then," volunteered the boy, "Pop's got a lot of them at the barn. He's got an auto what's always doing something it oughten to and I guess you can find all the tools you want."

Leading the way to the barn the boy showed Dick to the workshop where he found an assortment of tools more than sufficient for his purpose but the work was more difficult than he anticipated and he could not get the engine in working order again.

"Where were you going?" asked Mr. White, the owner of the place, who had returned and who had assisted Dick in repairing his cycle.

"I was on my way to Riverview," answered Dick. "Do you know where that is?"

"That's the Whildens' place, isn't it?" answered Mr. White. "That's about thirty to thirty-five miles from here. You couldn't find your way there in the dark even if your cycle was in shape."

"Where is the nearest town?" asked Dick.

"Never mind about that," returned Mr. White. "The only thing to do is to stay here to-night. We will get the cycle adjusted and I will put you on the right road in the morning."

"But I don't want to trespass on your hospitality," demurred Dick.

"No trespass at all," asserted Mr. White whose invitation had been seconded by his wife. "We are very glad to have you."

CHAPTER XX

A FORTUNATE ENCOUNTER

WE may now take up the thread of the story at the point where the four Boy Scouts headed by Pepper had espied the rapidly-approaching motor-cycle.

“Cricket!” cried Pepper when the rider, dismounting, stood before them. “I-it’s—”

“Dick Wilson!” exclaimed Rand. “What are you doing here?”

“Hallo, fellows,” returned Dick, “what are *you* doing here?”

“Waiting for you, I guess,” replied Rand. “Where were you going in such a hurry?”

“Well,” drawled Dick, “I was on my way to Riverview when you stopped me.”

“How did you g-g-go?” asked Pepper; “by the way of Chicago?”

“No, by the way of Bull Run,” replied Dick. “But say, have you found Jack?”

“Not yet,” replied Rand. “Then when you didn’t come back the Colonel sent us out to hunt you up. Where have you been?”

"It's too long a story to tell now," answered Dick, "but I was lost in the woods and couldn't find my way out."

"It's a story for the long Winter evenings," broke in Gerald. "Listen, my children, and you shall be told of the perilous ride of Dick the bold."

"What are you doing with all that artillery, Pepper?" asked Dick. "You look as if you were loaded for bear."

"Don't know," returned Pepper. "I've had a couple of dogs and a wild cat after me and I ain't sure what will come along next."

"Let's take the other road back," suggested Gerald, "and perhaps Pepper may bag a rhinoceros or something on the way."

Remounting their cycles the boys started off along the other road, glad to at least have located Dick. They had ridden but a short distance when Pepper who was quite a ways in advance of the others shouted:

"Hallo, what is going on there! Hurry up, boys, there is trouble ahead!"

"What is it, Pepper?" called Rand, who was nearest to him.

But without replying Pepper put on all speed



“TWO MEN LEADING AN EVIDENTLY RELUCTANT BOY.”

and dashed on down the road, the others following as quickly as they could. Coming to the top of the rise over which Pepper had ridden they saw what had attracted Pepper's attention, two men who were leading an evidently reluctant boy across a field towards the woods.

"It's Jack, sure as fate!" shouted Pepper.
"Hurry up, boys!"

The others needed no urging but raced on to where one of the men, who at the sight of the boys had endeavored to drag his captive more rapidly along, was struggling with his prisoner. Jumping from their cycles as they came near the spot the boys raced across the fields determined upon the rescue of their comrade. The man West, through whose friendly aid Jack had escaped from the outlaw band was heard urging flight and he took no active part in the struggle between Mac and his captive.

"I'm going to dig out of this," West was heard to say and suiting action to his words he ran away in the direction of the woods, into which he quickly disappeared.

"Coward," cried Mac, but Jack felt that he could tell a different tale if so disposed. Meantime his burly captor held him securely and

slowly made some progress toward the edge of the forest.

"Let him go," cried Pepper, who was first to get to the field of action, and drawing the revolver from his belt he added, "I will shoot if you don't."

The only answer was a mocking laugh but the man turned his face toward Pepper and the other boys who had come up, keeping Jack meantime between his body and the rescue party.

"Ye darn't shoot," was the assertion finally made and Pepper knew that this was true. Could it be that the outlaw would carry off their chum from before their very eyes? But there was a diversion unexpected to the others for Donald had appeared from a slightly different point and had gained the rear of the enemy, executed a flank movement as it were, and suddenly Mac was tripped and fell heavily backwards.

He retained his hold on Jack, however, but now all the boys took a hand in the skirmish and quickly were masters of the situation. They would have dearly liked to turn and turn about by making Mac a prisoner but thought it best to be content with getting away whole-skinned themselves and were mightily thankful

when they saw Mac sullenly grumbling to himself, make his way toward the woods.

"How are you, Jack?" asked Rand, when the man had disappeared. "Are you in any way hurt?"

"Only my feelings, I guess. I'll be all right in a minute," returned Jack, who was still dazed by the struggle he had gone through. "Say, how did you get here? I was never so glad to see anybody as I am you. I thought I was gone for sure."

"And we are glad enough to find you again," cried the boys, crowding around Jack. "How did you get here?"

"Don't bother him now," said Donald, "give him a chance to get rested."

"But how did *you* get here?" persisted Jack.

"We were out hunting for Dick but we didn't know we were going to round up both of you," answered Rand.

"What are we going to do with Jack?" asked Gerald. "He hasn't anything to ride on and it's too far to walk."

"Perhaps we can get the farmer to take him to Riverview," suggested Rand.

"We not only can but we will," said Pepper.

This was soon arranged with the farmer who agreed to drive Jack as far as Riverview and to provide dinner for the party, for a proper compensation.

While waiting for the meal to be prepared Jack briefly related the story of his capture and of his escape aided by West, and Dick also related the story of his ride.

After their dinner the drive to Riverview was soon made where they found Frank, who had returned by the other road.

“Hallo, boys!” he cried when they came. “What have you been doing now? I heard you had been here looking for me.”

“Oh, I guess we are all right now,” returned Rand, “but we thought you could help us.”

“Help you?” cried Frank, when they had finished their story of their adventures since their visit to Riverview. “You don’t need any help. I am going to hunt you up when I need any. But this thing has gone too far and that gang has got to be rooted out. Come along, boys, the quicker we get after them the better. I will take Jack in the auto and go over and consult Colonel Snow. We want to start things going at once.”

CHAPTER XXI

FINAL

“O-O-E!” shouted Pepper and Gerald when they came dashing along the road just as the automobile with the Sheriff and his posse was disappearing in the opposite direction.

“What can have happened to them now!” exclaimed the Colonel, hurrying down with Mr. and Mrs. Howell to meet them at the gateway. “What new trouble have they got into now?”

“We have f-f-found them!” shouted Pepper, waving his cap over his head and in consequence running his cycle into a clump of bushes where a colony of wasps had built a nest causing them to fly out in an angry cloud.

“There isn’t much doubt of that,” admitted the Colonel as the insects swarmed about them compelling a hasty retreat. “But I didn’t know that wasps were the ‘them’ that you were looking for.”

“I mean,” explained Pepper, when they had gotten a seemingly safe distance away from the wasps, “that we found him.”

"Him! Who?" demanded the Colonel.

"Jack and Dick," replied Pepper somewhat hazily. He was still alertly fighting off an attack from one of the offended animals.

"Jack and Dick!" ejaculated the Colonel. "What do you mean? Try and think straight, Pepper, and tell us who you found."

"Both of them," answered Pepper.

"Both of them!" echoed the Colonel. "Where did you find them and what were they doing?"

"They were on the road," replied Pepper. "Dick was g-g-going to Riverview and Jack was being dragged away by a lot of men."

"Dick was going to Riverview?" said the Colonel.

"Yes," replied Pepper, "and he was a prisoner in a cave and he had a f-fight with Monkey Rae and they were going to kill him."

"Kill Dick?"

"No, Jack, but a man named West got him off but they chased him and he hid in a haystack but they found him and he thought it was all up."

"Chased a man named West?"

"No. No. Jack!" answered Pepper, again

warily escaping from an aggressively persistent and buzzing insect.

"Who was going to do what?" asked the Colonel in despair. "Won't somebody straighten this story out?"

"Hurrah! here they come!" interrupted Gerald. "Gee, but the wasps are giving them the glad hand!"

The enraged wasps now swooped down upon the new arrivals, the party in the automobile. Putting on full speed and beating frantically at their tormentors Frank and the boys raced away from them at a pace that carried them far beyond where the Colonel was waiting.

"How do you do, Colonel Snow," called Frank, when they made their way back.

"Why, how are you, Mr. Whilden," responded the Colonel. "I see you have brought the wanderers back."

"Hardly," corrected Frank. "They brought themselves back."

"Let them alone and they'll come home," sang Gerald.

"That's right, Gerald," agreed Frank. "I don't believe they'll ever get into a hole that they can't get out of. But, I think, Colonel, we

ought to take some action in the matter of the outlaws."

"What is that?" asked the Colonel. "What have you to suggest?"

"Perhaps we had better let Jack tell his story first," replied Frank.

"Moonshiners, eh!" said the Colonel, when Jack had finished. "So that was the secret. Looks like a matter for the secret service. They can take care of that. I will send them word at once, and the Sheriff, too."

"That will be the thing," agreed Frank. "I guess we can safely leave it to them. Well, boys," he added, "as that is settled I will say good-bye, but don't get into any more trouble for awhile. I think if I had to look after you my hair would be gray in no time."

"We try not to," responded Pepper, "but somehow we can't seem to help it."

"I've had enough," put in Jack. "I am going back to Creston for a good rest. Say, but a bed will seem good to me."

"Better get there as soon as you can," laughed Frank, setting off at full speed to drive through the wasps who were still buzzing angrily.

"And the rest of you, too," added the Colonel.

"Not until we have had supper," protested Pepper.

"Of course not," agreed Mrs. Howell. "We will have it at once."

Supper over, at which not much was said as they were all thoroughly fatigued, the boys were glad to creep off to their resting-place in the mow where they were quickly asleep.

The next day they returned to Creston where they remained for some time, contenting themselves with short trips about the country until the gift of two canoes from Mr. Allen, started them upon a canoe cruise. The adventures which they met with on this trip will be found related in the third volume of the Boy Scouts' series.

But little more remains to be told. Immediately after their return to Creston, Colonel Snow notified the Secret Service of the existence of a whiskey making plant in the woods and a descent was made upon the place by the U. S. officers but the gang had taken the alarm and gone. Acting upon the information gained from Jack the plateau was approached through the gorge, following the path down which Jack had gone with the men. Ample precautions were

taken to protect the officers in their approach but the ascent was made without meeting any resistance from the moonshiners. Gaining the plateau the still was soon found and destroyed, further search bringing to light Donald's cycle which was returned to him. Exploring through the ravine, the one by which Jack attempted to escape, the officers found a passage which was closed by a large rock which could be moved from the inside only. It was through this way that the men had entered and left, the opening not being apparent from the outside.

THE END



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